

was not becoming quite obvious to her. That conviction, too, was not long in coming as the result of a unique vision. It was a full moon night. The bright moonbeams were dancing on the white ripples of the Ganges like molten silver. The Mother came out to the head of the steps leading to the water to enjoy that beauty without any other thought in her mind. Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna emerged from behind and rushed down by her into the river, and his body of pure spirit got dissolved in the holy waters of the river, which has been washing away the sins of millions of people for ages. The sight made the Mother's hair stand on end. Dumbfounded, she kept her eyes fixed there, when all of a sudden, Swami Vivekananda burst upon the view from nowhere and shouting with elation, 'Glory unto Ramakrishna' went on sprinkling handfuls of that water over the millions of people standing around, who, before her very eyes, became freed from this world at the very touch of that water. The vision was so vivid and life-like, that for days together she could not step into the Ganges for bathing for fear of touching the Master's divine body with her feet. This transcendent vision had another effect; it impressed on her mind indelibly and for ever the true meaning of the new avatar's life; and from a consideration of its implication she came to believe that she had an important part to play in fulfilling his mission.

The intense desire for doing good that was thus taking shape in the Mother's mind through various visions and thoughts, expressed itself in its full beauty in this very house through a touching incident. Nag Mahashaya¹ believed the Mother to be none other than the Mother of the Universe. The day that he came to the Mother's house, happened to be the eleventh day of the moon when orthodox Hindus do not eat rice, curries, lentil soups, etc., but take other and lighter things according to convenience. The Mother had sat for her scanty repast when the maid-servant

1. Durgacharan Nag, a devotee of the Master.

announced, 'Mother, who is Nag Mahashaya? He is bowing down to you; but he is striking his head so hard (against the pavement) that, methinks, it will bleed. Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) entreats him so earnestly from behind to stop, but there's no answer, as though he is unconscious. Is he mad, Mother?' In those days men devotees were not allowed to appear directly before the Mother but they bowed by touching the steps with their heads, and the maidservant went in to announce, 'Mother, they are saluting you.' On the present day no sooner the Mother heard about this self-forgetful devotee, than filled with affection she said to the woman, 'My dear, ask Yogen (Swami Yogananda) to send him here.' When Yogananda himself led Nag Mahashaya by his hand to the Mother's presence, she noticed that his forehead was swollen, his eyes full of tears, and his steps unsteady. Because of his tears he could not see the Mother; it was as though he was no longer in the conscious world. The Mother was so much moved by this sight that she forgot her natural shyness and taking hold of the hand of her devout son made him sit by her. Nag Mahashaya was still crying, 'Mother, Mother'—as though in a state of delirium, and yet he was otherwise so peaceful and unobtrusive! The Mother wiped away his tears. There were the articles of food in front—roots, fruits, and sweets. The Mother ate a little and with her own hand put some of these into Nag Mahashaya's mouth. His mind, however, was then so completely indrawn that he could not eat these, but went on repeating as before, 'Mother, Mother!' and sat holding her feet with both hands. The other women suggested, 'Mother, your meal is being spoiled. Let us ask Maharaj (Yogananda) to take him away. But the Mother replied, 'Let him alone! Let him calm down a little.' The Mother patted his head and body and uttered in his ears the name of the Master for some time; and then only he came round. The Mother now resumed her meal and went on feeding Nag Mahashaya, too, like a child. When he was being led

down after the meal, he kept on telling the Mother, 'Not I, not I; but you, you.' The Mother drew the attention of those present there to this and remarked, 'Look what perfect wisdom!' Overpowered with the joy of receiving food from the Mother's own hand, Nag Mahashaya said further, 'Mother is kinder than Father (Master), Mother is kinder than Father.' The Mother loved this son of hers very deeply and had the confidence that he could do everything for her.

There is another example of the Mother's affectionate dealings with Nag Mahashaya, which belongs to another period of time, and most probably to a different place, but is being introduced here for convenience of treatment. Putting on a dirty and worn out piece of cloth and with a basket of mangoes from his own garden on his head, Nag Mahashaya came to the Mother's house. The mangoes were of a special quality and some of them were marked with lime. At the Mother's house he went on moving about with the basket on his head. He would not give it to anybody, nor would he speak. At last Swami Yogananda sent word: 'Tell Mother that Nag Mahashaya has come with mangoes; he says nothing nor does he hand it over to anybody.' The Mother on hearing this said, 'Send him here.' Nag Mahashaya came with the basket on head and when a Brahmachari took it down, he made his obeisance at the Mother's feet, who noticed that he was as unconscious as on the previous occasion. He was repeating the name of the Master and while calling on the Mother tears were rolling down his chest. As the Master's worship had not been finished, some of the mangoes were cut and offered to him. When, after the worship, Yogin-Ma gave to the Mother on a leaf a few mango pieces, she took some of them and told Golap-Ma, 'Bring another *sal* leaf.' On that leaf she placed some of the pieces and asked Nag Mahashaya to eat them. But who was to do so? He had no physical sense; the hands were as good as paralysed. The Mother took hold of his hand and entreated him to

eat, but he simply took a piece and began rubbing it on his head. Helplessly the Mother had to ask some one to come up and lead him down. There he kept on striking his head on the steps till the forehead became swollen, and at long last, when consciousness returned, he left for home without partaking of the consecrated food.

When the Mother was living on the top of a godown near the Ganges in Calcutta, Nag Mahashaya visited her there. She gave him some *prasada* on a *sal* leaf. Through an intensity of devotion he looked upon everything touched by the sacred *prasada* as *prasada* itself and gulped down the leaf also. On another occasion the Mother gave him a piece of cloth, which he considered too sacred to be dishonoured by wearing; and so he tied it on his head as a turban. The Mother's affection for Nag Mahashaya found expression in a hundred ways even after his demise. A devotee one day noticed on entering the Mother's bedroom that she had hung up on the walls the pictures of Swami Vivekananda, Girishchandra Ghosh, and Nag Mahashaya, each of which she approached one after the other, wiped with a piece of cloth, put a mark of sandal paste, and then patted it with her hand. Last of all she said, keeping her eyes on Nag Mahashaya's picture, 'Quite a number of devotees come; but not another like this one.'

After passing some months at the garden house of Nilambar Babu, the Mother, most probably, went to Jayrambati. Then, when in the month of Paush (December-January) 1893-94, Balaram Babu's daughter Bhuvanmohini died, her mother Krishnabhavini Devi became so stricken with grief and so emaciated through disease that she had to be sent out for a change to Kailwar, about eighteen miles east of Arrah, in Bihar. But Krishnabhavini Devi agreed to go on condition that the Holy Mother would be with her. Accordingly, the Mother came to Calcutta in the beginning of 1894 and left for Kailwar with Krishnabhavini and her mother, as also Golap-Ma, Swamis Saradananda, Yogananda, and Trigunatitananda, and Swami Yogananda's

father Sri Navinchandra Chaudhury. They stayed there for two months. At Kailwar the Mother was delighted to see the wild deer moving in formation like a triangle and shooting away like arrows at the slightest sense of fear. She also noticed a strange device of the local people. Lest the jackals should drink of the date juice from the pots hung from the small palms, they hid themselves in pits in the ground, covering their heads with earthen vessels, and when the jackals approached, they drove them away by raising a cry.

After Kailwar the Mother was again at Jayrambati, where she, as also her mother fell ill, and Akshayakumar Sen, a devotee of the Master, called in a physician for their treatment. Then she came to stay at Belur till she was invited by Matangini Devi, mother of Swami Premananda and Krishnabhavini Devi, to be present at their home at Antpur where they were restarting the worship of Durga after a lapse of several years. They were all overjoyed to have her in their midst, and along with her Sri Shantiram Ghosh (brother of Swami Premananda) Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and Saradananda. After the celebrations, the Mother left for Jayrambati (October, 1894).

She returned to Calcutta in the beginning (probably February) of 1895. The desire again rose in her mind to go on a pilgrimage to North India. Accordingly, she had her mother and some of her brothers brought to Calcutta, and with them all, as well as Swami Yogananda, Golap-Ma, and Yogin-Ma, she left for Banaras and Vrindaban. At the latter place, they stayed for about two months (middle of February to middle of April); and then they came back to Calcutta, from where her relatives left for Jayrambati. But she spent a month at the Colootola house of Master Mahashaya, after which she went to Jayrambati by way of Kamarpukur (13th May, 1895).¹

1. On page 319 of *Shri Shri Mayer Katha*, part I, we read, 'Returning from there (Vrindavan), the Mother lived at the Colootola house of Master

From Vrindavan, the Mother had brought a small image of Gopala (Baby Krishna), which lay at her Jayram-bati house without any worship. One day, as the Mother lay on her cot, she saw Gopala crawling to the cot and saying, 'You brought me here, but have shelved me away—you don't give me any food, you don't worship. If you don't worship me, none will.' The Mother got up at once, brought out Gopala from where he was and kissed him by touching his chin with her hand, and after offering him some flowers placed him near the Master's picture. From that day Gopala never again missed his daily worship along with the Master's. We have noted that during her stay in the village, the Mother spent some time at Kamarpukur also. Thus in November, 1895, she was there with Golap-Ma who suffered then from malaria.

We next meet the Holy Mother in Calcutta during the marriage of Sri Ramakrishna Bose, son of Balaram Babu, which took place in the second week of May (27th Vaishakh), 1896. As Balaram Babu's house was rather crowded with guests, she was accommodated in the house of Sri Sharat Sarkar, a young devotee of the Master. When the Mother was there, one day, a letter from Swami Vivekananda, urging all to take up the service of Narayana in all beings, was read to her; and she remarked, 'Naren (Vivekananda) is an instrument of Thakur (the Master) who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work, for doing good to all in the world. What Naren writes is true and must be fulfilled hereafter.' Referring to this stay of the Mother in the house of Sharat Sarkar, his friends and others would say, 'Sharat, you have performed Durga worship for about a month, while people do it for three days only. Whereas they worship a clay image, you have worshipped a living image of the Divine Mother'.

Mahashaya for about a month.' In his unpublished memoirs, too, Master Mahashaya mentions that the Mother left for Jayrambati from his house at 52 Bhavani Datta Lane (Colootola).

After a month had been spent here she was accommodated in a rented house near the Ganges on the Sarkar Bari Lane, in Baghbazar (Calcutta). On the ground floor of the house was stocked turmeric, whence it was called the godown (Gudam-badi); the first and second floors were habitable. The topmost floor was allotted to the Mother and other women devotees. The Mother had a wide view of the Ganges from there. On the lower floor lived Swamis Brahmananda, and Yogananda, and a few other monks who attended to the Mother's needs. The Mother lived here for some five or six months, and then left for the village after the worship of Kali in November. During her next visit, which came off in the second quarter of 1898, she lived at 10/2 Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar.

HER BURDEN-BEARERS

The period of the Mother's stay at 10/2 Bosepara Lane is important in more than one sense. From the second quarter of the year she had been living there. And Swami Yogananda was also there as her attendant. Swami Trigunatitananda went there whenever he could spare time from his duties in connection with the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan*. Some others, also, lived in the house now and then.

In the previous year Swami Vivekananda had returned from America to Calcutta (27th February, 1897). And after a contract had been entered into on the 3rd February, 1898, for the purchase of a plot of land on the Ganges at Belur for the permanent location of the Ramakrishna Math, the monastery had been shifted temporarily from Alambazar to Nilambar Babu's garden for carrying on the building work on the new land. When the actual construction began in April under the able supervision of Swami Vijnanananda, the Holy Mother was one day brought in a boat to the monastery. She was accompanied by Swami Yogananda, Brahmachari Krishnalal (Swami Dhirananda), and Golap-Ma. As soon as the boat touched the landing stairs, a conch was blown to announce the auspicious event; and when the Mother alighted, the monks washed her feet and with extreme veneration led her to the verandah of the shrine, where she sat, while the monks fanned her to give her relief from the heat of the day. After all had bowed down to her, she entered the shrine to worship the Master; this over, she offered him food and laid him to rest. She herself took some rest after lunch and at four in the afternoon started for the boat with her companions. Just then Brahmachari Krishnalal carried the earnest request of Swami Brahmananda, 'May the Mother condescend to tread on the new land of the Math before she departs.' Accordingly, the Mother went

to the land by the boat, while Swami Yogananda walked to it. Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss MacLeod, who were then staying in a house there, came out to greet the Mother and show her round. How delighted was the Mother to see her dream of having a permanent monastery on its way to fulfilment! After she had seen all, she said with joy, 'At long last the boys have a place to lay their heads in — the Master has cast his benign look (on them) after such a long time!' At the end, she got into the boat and started for Calcutta.

Swami Vivekananda came back to the Math in October, 1898, after his visit to Amarnath and Kshirbhavani in Kashmir. He was in bad health then. On the second day of the Durga worship he, along with Swamis Brahmananda, Prakashananda and Vimalananda, went to Baghbazar to make his obeisance at the feet of the Mother. There he fell prostrate before her. The Mother stood at a corner, covering her entire body with a wrapper. Her talks with the Swami were in a very low tone, so that they had to be repeated more distinctly by Brahmachari Krishnalal. When the Swami prostrated himself, the Mother blessed him by touching his head with her right hand. Then this loving and world-famous son of the Mother complained with an air of petulance, 'Such indeed is your Master, Mother! Just because a Fakir's disciple in Kashmir used to visit me, the Fakir cursed me saying, "He shall have to leave this place in three days with stomach trouble." And sure enough, it happened just as he had said — I had to flee away helter-skelter! Your Master could do nothing whatsoever.' The Mother had her answer communicated, 'It's an occult science. One can't but bow down before it, my boy! They didn't, in fact, come to destroy. Our Master heeded even such things as the cry of a lizard or a sneeze.¹ And we hear that Sankar-

1. At these sounds one must stop doing anything, as they augur evil.

acharya too, allowed his body to be afflicted with a disease.¹ It is known to you that as the result of a curse from his cousin Haladhari, the Master had haemorrhage from his mouth. Your suffering from disease is the same as the Master suffering from it.' The Swami, still in a mood of irascibility, protested that he was not ready to accept all this despite the Mother's argument, and in fact the Master was nothing. Then the Mother answered with some amusement, 'Is there any other way out, my son? For, sure enough, you are tied to his hem-string.' The Swami knew the truth of this too well, and so he silently bowed down and took leave with tearful eyes.

Sister Nivedita, after returning from Kashmir, took up her residence with the Mother who was very kind to her and treated her like a daughter. But she soon realized that the stay of a foreigner in a brahmin family could complicate matters for the Mother's relations who had to move amidst orthodox people; and hence, though the Mother said nothing, she, of her own accord, shifted to another house on the same lane.

Soon came the day (12th November, 1898) of the annual Kali worship, and the monks at the Belur Math made preparations for the purpose. The Mother went there in the morning with the picture of the Master which she worshipped daily. After alighting from the boat at the monastery at Nilambar Babu's garden house, she proceeded on foot to the newly bought land and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped the Master there. At noon she returned to the monastery where she took some *prasada*. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and Saradananda to 16 Bosepara Lane, where the Sister's Girls' School was formally declared open by the Mother.

1. At Kamakhya a Tantrika was defeated in argument by Sankara; and in order to avenge this defeat the Tantrika laid a curse on him that he should get fistula, and he did get it.

Either during this or some other visit of the Mother to the Math land, Swami Vivekananda went round with her and said, 'This is your own place, Mother; and here you move about at ease.' The Mother said afterwards about this land, 'Of a truth, I always saw as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganges — in a cottage just where the present monastery and plantain trees are.' This vision referred to a time when the land had not been purchased.

On the completion of the new buildings, Swami Vivekananda, on the 9th December, 1898, carried on his own shoulders the vessel containing the Master's ashes, placed it on a big altar on the newly bought land and performed worship and *homa* duly. Some monks began to reside there from that very day, while the whole monastery shifted to the new buildings on the 2nd January of the following year. The Mother had prayed for a lasting habitation for her sons; and here it was.

This happiness, was however, unfortunately marred by a very sad event in a few months. Even while the Sister Nivedita School and the Belur Math were becoming accomplished facts and the devotees of the Master had reason to be proud, Swami Yogananda lay seriously ill at the Mother's rented house in Calcutta. Two physicians of repute, Dr. Bepinbehari Ghosh and Dr. Shashibhushan Ghosh, both devotees of the Master, were in attendance, and both were unanimous that the intestines were dangerously out of order. As the allopathic treatment produced no result, Kavirajas were called in to try the indigenous system. The monks from the Belur Math were constantly in attendance. In fact, every possible step was taken for his recovery; but the patient's condition deteriorated. The Mother was so very anxious for him that any apparent alleviation of the sufferings of Yogananda produced a corresponding elation in her, and she too felt healthier; but as he lost more and more weight she too, became correspondingly emaciated. For the proper nursing of the

patient the Mother suggested at this time that his wife should be brought there; but Swami Yogananda objected vehemently. The Mother still brought her to him and said, 'Give her some instruction.' The monk Yogananda, however, who was free from all worldly shackles and whose vision was more than ever bent towards Infinity, said with extreme unconcern, 'As to that, you know best.' As the last day approached, one of the Mother's attendants went upstairs to give her flowers for worship, when he saw her sitting with her face to the west and legs outstretched, while tears rolled down her cheeks. He tried to console her as best as he could but the Mother asked in desperation, 'My boy, what will happen to my son Yogen?' The attendant tried to impress on her that there was really no cause for anxiety, for Swami Yogananda would recover. Still she said, 'But, my boy, I have seen it...At dawn I saw that the Master had come to take him.' And she burst into tears. Then regaining a little composure she added, 'Don't you tell anybody. Such things are not to be talked about.'

At noon of the 28th March, the condition of the patient became worse and at three in the afternoon his face shone with a celestial light. Brahmachari Krishnalal, who sat at his head, now began weeping; and the Mother, who was upstairs and whose ears were alert, caught the sound; and she too burst forth into a wail. An attendant, surprised at this piteous wailing of the Mother, who was otherwise so calm and collected, ran immediately upstairs to compose her with entreaties by taking hold of her feet; but she brushed him aside saying, 'Off with you! My Yogen has left me — who will now look after me?' Everything was over soon. The Mother next day heaved a long sigh and said, 'A brick has slipped off the structure; now the whole thing will come down.'

From the subsequent talks and action of the Mother we can have an idea of the depth of her affection for this son of hers, and the extent of her dependence on him. In her reminiscent moods she said at different times, 'Nobody

loves me as Yogen did. If anybody gave him so much as eight annas, he kept it by saying, "Mother will go out on pilgrimages, etc., and then she will need it." He was always by my side. Because he lived in the midst of women, the boys taunted him. Yogen told me, "Mother you will call me 'Yoga'." Yogen passed away saying, "Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and the Master came to take me, Mother."...The Master used to speak of him as Arjuna... Sarat (Swami Saradananda) and Yogen — these two belong to my inner circle.'

It should be mentioned here that the Mother referred to Swamis Yogananda and Saradananda as her 'burden-bearers'. She said, 'I don't see any one who can now carry my burden (i.e., shoulder my responsibilities). Yogen was there. And there is Krishnalal too, — calm and quiet — a disciple of Yogen.' On another occasion she said, 'Boy-Yogen served me very well indeed, none else can do the like of it. Only Sarat is able to render such service. Sarat has been doing so after boy-Yogen. My child, it is extremely difficult to shoulder my responsibilities. None other than Sarat will be able to carry my burden.' Instances of Swami Saradananda's incomparable service will be plentiful as we proceed. But now we are dealing with Swami Yogananda's.

We have referred to the worship of Jagad-dhatri at the Mother's paternal home. Her family was poor and there were not enough members to assist in the preparations for the worship. Consequently, the Mother had to go to Jayrambati at that time for scouring the metal vessels and such other tasks. To remove this difficulty Swami Yogananda purchased wooden vessels with some money he had collected and said to her, 'Mother, you won't have to go for scouring the vessels.'

Every memory of Yogananda was dear to the Mother. The Swami had got a quilt made for her. Finding it worn out after long use, she handed it over one day to her disciple Bibhutibhushan Ghosh to have it renewed, by

carding the cotton and changing the cover. But soon the thought occurred to her that if the quilt was thus renewed then the memory of her beloved son might be hurt. That was too sad to contemplate and so she corrected herself and said, 'No, Bibhuti, you need not take the quilt. Yogen gave it to me — the very sight of it reminds me of him.'

Once on coming to the Belur Math during the Durga worship, the Mother saw an oil-painting of Swami Yogananda hung on the wall outside the Master's shrine. She gazed at it intently for a considerable time and then entered the shrine to bow down before the Master as usual; but from there she came out so quickly that to the people present there it seemed as though her mind was engaged in so intense a search after her son in some unseen domain that it refused to be fixed to this world.

The Mother regarded Swami Yogananda as belonging to that galaxy of divine souls who are known as Ishwara-kotis, or as Sri Krishna's companion Arjuna, who came down again with Sri Ramakrishna to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He served the Mother for more than twelve long years (autumn of 1886 to spring of 1899) with unswerving devotion.

Swami Yogananda's successor was selected long before he left his field. Swami Saradananda once said to him, 'Yogin, I can't really follow all that Naren (Swami Vivekananda) says. In what a diversity of moods he talks! Whatever standpoint he takes up, he makes so much of it that the others pale into insignificance.' Yogananda said, 'I tell you one thing, Sarat, you cling to the Mother; whatever she says will be right.' Not stopping there, he took him to the Mother. And in this way Saradananda gradually got the privilege of serving the Mother which he did in the ideal way and became immortal in the annals of the Ramakrishna movement. But he did not step into Swami Yogananda's shoes immediately after the latter's passing away. He was then in Western India, collecting

money under the instructions of Swami Vivekananda. On his return to the Math, he became busy with multifarious duties. Hence Brahmachari Krishnalal continued as her attendant for some time, while Swami Trigunatitananda, who spent the whole day outside in connection with the fortnightly periodical *Udbodhan*, stayed in the Mother's house at night and had in his hands the general direction of her household. In fact, he was the Mother's chief attendant till at the end of 1902 he left for U. S. A. Needless to say that he discharged his duties faithfully.

A little over four months after the passing of Swami Yogananda, her youngest brother Abhay succumbed to an attack of cholera. Prasanna and Varada, two other brothers of the Mother, then lived at Chorebagan in Calcutta by turns and earned their livelihood by priesthood. Abhay, too, was then with them. He was studying medicine after passing the Entrance Examination. And just as he had finished his course at Campbell Medical School and was waiting for the result of the final examination, he was attacked by that fell disease. The Mother went to see him in a palanquin, and Swamis Saradananda and Prakashananda nursed him. But destiny was inexorable and Abhay passed away. The Mother's sorrow was so deep and abiding that in later days she used to speak of her little nephews, 'May these live long, even though they may not be educated.' When her sisters-in-law protested, 'Is that really the way you should bless any one?' she used to reply with a sad countenance, 'Yes, dear, yes! What do you know? I brought up Abhay, and he is gone!'

After Abhay's demise, the Mother could find little solace in Calcutta; and hence she left for her village by way of Burdwan. After crossing the river Damodar, she got into a cart and Swami Trigunatitananda walked in front with a staff on his shoulder like a bodyguard. When it was the third watch of the night, the Swami suddenly saw that a portion of the road had been washed away by a flood, so that if the cart passed over the

depression it might overturn or get a jolt, as a consequence of which the Mother's sleep might be disturbed or she might even be hurt. Without losing any time, he lay down on the depression and ordered the cart to be driven over his strong muscular body. Fortunately, the Mother woke up and looking ahead understood the whole situation with the help of the moonlight. She got down at once and walked over the place, reproving Trigunatitananda for his rash act.

Here is another instance of Swami Trigunatitananda's devotion to the Mother. Yogin-Ma once asked him to obtain from the market some hot chillies for the Mother. The Swami wanted to get the best, that is, hottest, ones and therefore, walked from Baghbazar to Burrabazar, a distance of about three miles, tasting the chillies at every market till he got the best at the latter place! But by then his tongue had become swollen. Even in America, he remembered her and remitted some money every month to her.

Before we close the chapter we must add for the information of the readers that though the monks looked after the needs and comforts of the Mother all along after the Master's passing away, the services of Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma were not inconsiderable. They often lived with the Mother not only in Calcutta, but also at Jayrambati. Charmed with their devotion the Mother said subsequently, 'I can't stay in Calcutta unless Golap and Yogin are there.'

A SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATION

When the Mother sat by uncle Abhay's death-bed holding his head on her lap, caressing it softly with extreme affection, Abhay kept his eyes fixed on his sister's and said in an appealing voice, 'Sister, they are all left behind; do have an eye on them.' The Mother accepted that duty tacitly. Uncle Abhay's wife Surabala was then in the family way and was living at her father's house. She was born to misery; her mother died in her childhood and she was brought up by her mother's mother and sister. Her grandmother died soon after Abhay. On arrival at Jayrambati, the Mother remembered Abhay's request and had Surabala brought to her. A few days later, Surabala's aunt too, passed away. Unable to withstand so many bereavements in quick succession, Surabala's mind lost its balance; and while still in that state of mental aberration, she gave birth on the 26th January, 1900, to a daughter, who was named Radharani, or in short, Radhu or Radhi. The Mother's worry was great, for Surabala could not in her then state be trusted to take due care of the child. Fortunately, however, a woman named Kusumkumari came to Jayrambati next month with Swami Achalananda of Banaras. She willingly took upon herself the care of the child and stayed on at Jayrambati till the month of Jyeshtha (May-June).

It was circumstances that forced the Mother to choose Jayrambati as her chief place of residence, though it was not quite a happy choice. By divine dispensation her household worries went on multiplying all the time. We have used the phrase 'divine dispensation' with due deliberation — it is not a production of our imagination. With a view to making his incarnation a success, the Master had been forging around the Mother various fetters of love, the strongest of which was Radhu. After the Master's passing away, the Mother's mind found

no solace anywhere. It kept on groping in a dark vacuum as it were, and she prayed, 'Why should I live any longer?' Just then she had the vision of a girl of ten or twelve years of age, with a red cloth on her body, frolicking about in front of her. The Master pointed to the girl and said, 'Let this be your main-stay. What a number of boys will now come to you!' With this he disappeared, and the girl too was nowhere to be seen. Long after that, the Mother was one day sitting in her brother's house at Jayrambati. Surabala was then unmistakably insane. She went in front holding under her arms some patched clothes which brushed the ground behind, and she was followed by her daughter Radhu at a distance, crawling and crying. The sight sent a dart of horror through the Mother's mind, who thought, 'Of a truth, who else will look after this child if I don't? She has no father, and her mother is mad.' She ran and lifted the child into her arms, and the Master immediately appeared to her to say, 'This is that girl; hold on to her; this is *yoga-maya*.'

This fact is borne out by the Mother's own references to it at different times. Her fondness for Radhu gave rise to doubts in critical observers who often blurted out trenchant remarks. One devotee, for instance, asked, 'Mother, why are you so fond of her? You are uttering "Radhi, Radhi" day and night like any worldling. And yet you pay no attention to the many devotees that come to you. Such attachment! Is this good?' Such a question was nothing new to the Mother. She would answer modestly, 'We are women, we are like that.' But today she warmed up a little and said, 'Where can you get a parallel to this? Would you find out a second one like me? The fact is, the mind of those who meditate on the Supreme Reality becomes very sharp and pure, and whatever it takes hold of, it clasps with some might. This appears as attachment. When the lighting flashes, it is reflected on the sashes and not on the blinds.' On

another occasion she said, 'See! They say that I am lost in thoughts of Radhu, that I am greatly attached to her. If that bit of attachment were not there, then this body would not have survived the passing away of the Master. Is it not for his work that he has preserved this body by involving me in the thoughts of Radhu? When my mind is detached from her, this body will perish too.' And she said, 'This constant thought of Radhi that I have, is only a delusion which I have accepted for making living possible for me.' The meaning of such avowals is so palpably clear, that we need not mar their beauty by additional remarks.

Other reasons also might have contributed to the kind of background that was created for the unfoldment of the Mother's life. As some devotees who aspired after material welfare were scared away by the Master's cancer, thinking that it was useless to run after a man who had not himself transcended bodily shortcomings, so also God might have created round the Holy Mother an encrustation of apparent worldliness in order to keep away people who appreciate only exuberance of spirit but are blind to silent and hidden virtues. Furthermore, though the Master set an incomparable ideal for both monks and householders, yet the most valuable part of his life was spent outside family surroundings; and hence we lack here an abundance of examples of how a person, living in the midst of hundreds of daily worries, can yet rise higher through sheer force of will, character, and faith in God. The life of the Mother is woven with the warp and woof of various complicated domestic problems; and the events there are full of tears, troubles, and vexations, even from the worldly point of view. And yet she is not only always entirely above their degrading influence but her every movement is resplendent with a divine grace. This interfusion of divine and human elements makes the Mother's life instructive and its appeal irresistible to men who tread the wonted paths of the work-a-day world, and inspiring and illuminat-

ing to others who are in search of a higher ideal. And in particular, her life is of special significance to women who spend their lives with their families in a more real sense than men do. We shall come across these facts over and over again. For the present we are having a passing look at them.

To have an inkling of the many obstacles through which the Mother's love had to manifest itself, let us look at the conduct of her brothers. During the Mother's stay elsewhere, her brothers, the 'uncles', pestered her for monetary help or troubled her about family dissensions. When reading their letters out to her, somebody might remark, 'Give them plenty of money, Mother. Pray to the Master. Let them enjoy to their hearts' content, so that their hankering may cease.' To this she would reply, 'Can their craving ever cease? Nothing will stop them — not even if they are given all and more than they ask for. Will worldly people ever be satisfied? There are only tales of woe at their place. It's that Kele (Kali) who always cries for money. And following him, Prasanna too is now doing so. Varada never wants; he says, "Where can sister get money?" On another day she said about her exacting brothers with a shrug, 'They are crying themselves hoarse for money only, my son! — "Give us money, give us money." They never ask for knowledge and devotion even by accident. So let them have what they want.' Needless to say that through the Mother's grace they were having what they wanted.

From the above account the reader must not conclude that there was no finer element in the mental make-up of the uncles, or that they had no nobler aspiration. The great poet and dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh once commented that the uncles in their previous births had practised terrible penances even to the point of sacrificing their own heads; and that was why they got the Mother of the Universe as their sister. And from different events we can conclude that they were to some extent

conscious of her divinity, though it was so overlaid with worldly sentiments that it exerted no perceptible influence over their lives. In illustration of this, let us cite some examples, though they belong to a later period.

When the Mother was returning to Jayrambati after the worship of Durga in Girish Babu's house in 1907, she sent direction to her brothers to post some people with light and other equipment to receive them across the Amodar. But when she went there with her companions, there was no one to receive her. As a result, they had to ford the river somehow and reach Jayrambati in the dark. At dinner time a devotee remarked, 'Mother, have you noticed their lack of any sense of propriety? You were coming, but they did not send a single man to the riverside.' At this the Mother asked uncle Prasanna, 'I came here alone; why did you not send any one to the riverside? These sons of mine came; but you didn't send any man, nor did you yourself come.' 'Sister,' replied uncle Prasanna, 'I didn't send anybody for fear of Kali, lest he should say, "He is going there to ingratiate himself into sister's favour."' Do I not understand how high you are and what rare souls these devotees are? I know everything; but I am helpless. The Lord has not granted me that power this time. Kindly bless me that I may get you as my sister in every life just as I have you in this; I don't want anything else.' 'Again in your house?' the Mother cut him short with a shrug. 'It's enough you had it so this time. Rama said, "May I never again be born in Kausalya's womb after my death."' Among you again!'

Another day, uncle Prasanna argued with the Holy Mother, 'Sister' I heard it said that you appeared to some one in dream, gave him a *mantra*, and assured him also of his salvation. And you brought us up on your lap — should we be for ever what we are?' The Mother said in reply, 'It shall be as the Master will ordain. And mind you, how often Sri Krishna played with the cow-boys, frolicked with

them, and shared the same food with them; yet did they know who Krishna was?'

Not that the Mother was always so indifferent; she was ready to help these dear brothers of her and put hopes in their hearts for this world as also the next. Uncle Prasanna asked her once, 'Sister, we were born of the same womb; what shall be our lot?' The Mother said encouragingly, 'That's true to be sure; what fear need you have?'

In addition to these able but inconsiderate brothers there were the foolish but helpless nieces. We shall see, as we proceed, that the Mother had to shoulder the burden of some of these. And to crown all, there was Surabala, better known among the devotees as the mad aunt. Her aberrations sometimes reached such a pitch, that the Mother was heard to say, 'Maybe, I offered the *bel* leaves along with their thorns on Siva's head; and hence there is this thorn by my side.'

So long as the Mother lived at Jayrambati, she had to undergo strenuous physical labour. Times there were when she boiled bushels of paddy all the livelong day; and on succeeding days she was constantly at the husking machine making rice. And along with these were cooking, drawing water, scouring utensils and such other routine works. She was as diligent as her mother, by whose side she was always to be found. At one time the Mother had to work in the family so hard that her legs got swollen and she remarked, pointing this to others, 'Girish Babu was true when he said that these relatives had performed the severest of penances.'

Let us now turn back to the time of the Mother's stay at Jayrambati in 1900. As it was usual with her in those days to spend some time at Kamarpukur, during her stay in her village home, she went there this time as well but fell ill. We have it on the authority of the maidservant Sagarer Ma, of whom we wrote earlier, that the Mother had an attack of diarrhoea accompanied by vomiting,¹ and

1. This is how Sagarer Ma puts it in her simple way. In reality it was a

that the maid nursed her during the illness. Noticing the woman cleansing everything with her hands the Mother asked, 'Well, my dear, I don't think you feel any repulsion!' Sagarer Ma replied, 'Why should I be cleansing with the hand if I should feel so?' Information was sent to Jayrambati and Belur Math at the commencement of the attack. When the Mother came round a little, uncle Kali took her in a bullock-cart to Jayrambati. Two monks came from Belur Math after some three or four days, but the Mother declined to go to Calcutta. Pleased with the services of Sagarer Ma, the Holy Mother blessed her saying, 'You will never be in want of food or cloth.' And Sagarer Ma assured someone after recounting the incident, 'To tell you the truth, sir, I have never been in difficulty about food and cloth. The Master manages it for me.'

During the time of which we are writing, the Mother spent a year and a quarter at Jayrambati, and then came to Calcutta in October, 1900, with her uncle Nilmadhav, the mad aunt, Radhu, and Bhan-pisi, a woman acquaintance of the village of whom we have spoken earlier. In Calcutta, she lived for a year at 16-A Bosepara Lane, the Nivedita School having shifted from there to 17 Bosepara Lane.

Next year, Swami Vivekananda celebrated the annual worship of Durga at the Belur Math; and as he felt it imperative to have the Mother's presence at the worship, she was prevailed upon to come to Belur with some women devotees and stay at the garden house of Nilambar Babu for five days (18th to 22nd October, 1901). The worship was performed in the name of the Holy Mother; for Swami Vivekananda declared, 'We are all penniless beggars; the worship can't be in our names.' The Mother's attendant Brahmachari Krishnalal officiated as the priest under the

case of cholera as we learn from the Belur Math Diary, which further records that Swami Trigunatitananda went to Jayrambati and that another monk went there in October to bring her back to Calcutta. She was present at the Belur Math on the 24th January, 1901, at the birthday anniversary of the Master.

direction of (*tantradharaka*) Ishwarchandra Chakravarty, father of Swami Ramakrishnananda. Through the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda offered twenty-five rupees to the *tantradharaka* for his priestly offices.

One night a thief made his way into the kitchen of the Mother's rented house in Calcutta by breaking the window on the narrow lane on which it looked. The mad aunt was in the habit of leaving her bed even while it was dark. As she approached the kitchen with a lamp in hand, she screamed and fainted at the sight of the man. Her consciousness returned through the effort of other inmates, but her brain became all the more deranged, so much so, that the Mother decided to leave with her for the village. Kusumkumari had taken charge of Radhu on the latter's arrival at Calcutta. Yogin-Ma and others, therefore, argued that such a woman should be engaged for looking after the child even at Jayrambati, and the devotees would defray the expenses; the Mother could thus stay on after sending home Surabala with her daughter. The Mother heard all that, but said nothing then. But when she sat for *japa* in the evening, an agonizing scene floated before her mind's eye which made her restless and made her reverse Yogin-Ma's plan. She saw that the girl was being subjected to such untold suffering owing to the craziness of her mother, that there was grave risk to her life at any moment. The Mother was so overpowered at the thought that she left her seat hurriedly and, communicating everything to Yogin-Ma, said definitely that it would not be possible for her to live in Calcutta separated from Radhu; for the good of the girl the Mother must be by her side at Jayrambati.

The Mother left for the village home with Surabala, Radhu, and Nilmadhav; but Bhanu-pisi stayed back for continuing her holy bath in the Ganges for some time more. The history of the next two years is a complete blank. But as we know that in those days the Mother usually went to Jayrambati before the Jagad-dhatri worship

(November) and came back to Calcutta at the end of winter, we may guess that she might have done so during these two years also.

In the month of Magha (January-February), 1904, when the Mother came to Calcutta, she took up her residence at 2/1 Baghbazar Street, which Swami Saradananda had engaged for her. She lived here for about a year and a half. For bringing her to Calcutta this time Swamis Saradananda and Virajananda, and Yogin-Ma went to Jayrambati by way of Burdwan and the Mother came along with Nilmadhav, Bhanu-pisi, and others by the same route. In Calcutta, Swami Saradananda lived in the same rented house with the Mother for taking care of her. From this time onward, Mrs. Ole Bull began to help her with regular remittances.

In the meantime the number of Mother's dependants had increased. Her uncle Nilmadhav, who had been a cook at the Paikpara Raj house, retired in old age on a small pension. But he was unmarried and had nobody to look after him. Hence he spent his last few years under the Mother's care. This was his second visit to Calcutta with her. The Mother took a personal interest in his comforts. If the devotees brought for her some good things—some untimely fruits—from the market she was sure to select the best among them for Nilmadhav. If any one protested, she explained, 'Dear son, how long, after all, will uncle live? It is best to have his desires fulfilled now. As for us, we shall live pretty long to have many things to eat.' In words and deeds this natural love flowed not only towards Nilmadhav, but also towards everyone who came into contact with her, of which we shall get plenty of illustrations in future.

During this stay at the Baghbazar house, the Mother continued to be in close relation with the Nivedita School; and the workers of the School, too, tried to serve her in all possible ways. Their carriage was at her disposal for going to the Ganges for bathing, for visiting the zoological garden,

the museum, the botanical garden, Kalighat, and other places of interest. She took these opportunities to walk a little to see if her legs could have some relief from the rheumatism which she had developed at Dakshineswar and which became her constant companion, so that she had to limp about.

During the Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday in August) celebration¹ the Mother went on invitation to Kankurgachhi along with her nieces Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu, as also Golap-Ma. The Mother was highly pleased with the celebration; but it strained her endurance to the utmost when at the request of Swami Yogavinode, the head of the monastery, she had to sit silently with her body covered all over with a cotton sheet according to her habit to accept the salutations of the devotees, which continued till six o'clock in the evening. She spoke of her discomfort to Golap-Ma only after returning home.

While still at this house she went one night to see the performance of *Vilvamangala* at the request of Girish Babu who himself played the role of the false spiritual aspirant. When that hypocrite told the woman Thakamani, that he would most assuredly teach her the love of Krishna, the Mother remarked with a derisive smile, 'It may as well not be done at this age.' And at the sight of the all-absorbing love of *Vilvamangala* she said, 'Aha! Aha!'

At this time Gopaler Ma, the very old woman devotee of the Master, lived in a room at the Nivedita School premises. The Mother revered her like a mother-in-law and sent food for her from her own kitchen. In the closing days, the old lady was very little conscious of anything except her rosary, for which she became restless if it was not at hand. She could not recognize anybody; but when the Mother came she said in a faint voice, 'Who's that? Is it you, daughter-in-law? Come.'

1. There is an annual celebration at the place in commemoration of the interment of the holy ashes of the Master there on that day.

The Mother could not go to Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) of 1904, because her household had become so big that moving about with all was an expensive affair. Moreover, she was improving in health and the devotees could not entertain the idea of her going to a malarious village just then. Nonetheless, the worship was so dear to her that she saw to the timely despatch of all the necessary things with her brother Varada and a devotee; and she got over her anxiety only after they returned to assure her that everything had been done properly. Then at the end of November the proposal for her going to Puri took shape.

The Bengal Nagpur Railway had by this time been completed. The Mother travelled in a reserved second-class compartment with Nilmadhv, the mad aunt, Golap-Ma, Sister Lakshmi, Radhu, Master Mahashaya's wife, Chunilal Babu's wife, and Kusumkumari. Swami Premananda and two devotees got into an inter class compartment. The train reached Puri in the morning, and the Mother with her relatives and women companions took residence in Kshetrabasir Math of the Boses, while Swami Premananda and others went to their second house near the sea called Shashi-niketana. The Mother's first duty at Puri was to go to the Jagannatha temple to have a look at the Lord. On subsequent days it was her daily task to visit the temple with others early morning and evening. One day there was arranged at her residence a *Katha* by a temple priest, which consisted in relating the story and glory of Jagannatha from the ancient books. On this occasion about fifty temple priests were sumptuously fed. The Holy Mother and others used to obtain on payment the consecrated food from the temple for their daily meals; the feast for the priests also was arranged similarly.

At Puri the Mother had a boil on her foot which gave her intense pain, and yet she did not allow it to be operated on. One day at the temple, somebody's foot touched

the boil, thereby causing excruciating pain to her. When Swami Premananda heard of this, he came the next day with a young doctor ostensibly to pay their obeisance to the Mother. She, as was her habit on such occasions, sat covering herself completely with a cotton sheet. The doctor now brought out his knife and, in the act of saluting by touching the feet, opened the boil and then begged her pardon saying, 'Mother, please don't be offended.' This unexpected move irritated the Mother a little at first. But when through proper dressing the pain subsided and the wound healed up in a trice, she heartily blessed her sons despite their dare-devilry.

A few days after this, the Mother wanted to bring her mother and a brother to Puri to give them an opportunity to see the Lord. A devotee was accordingly sent to Jayarambati. This had to be done without the mad aunt's knowledge, for she was too envious to brook anybody's sharing the Mother's affection or money which were to be monopolized by or kept in reserve for herself and her daughter. The devotee went via Vishnupur by train, the railway line on that side having been constructed a little earlier, and communicated the Mother's invitation to grandmother and uncle Kali who alone were expected to come. But at the news of the pilgrimage the number swelled till a big party¹ consisting of the grandmother, uncle Kali with his father-in-law, wife, and two sons, and a villager named Sitaram started by way of Garbeta. No sooner did they step into the Kshetrabasir Math than Surabala got into a frenzy, and went on castigating the Mother with all kinds of gestures and postures and doggerel verses.

It is an immemorial tradition at Puri that no caste distinction is observed so far as the *prasada* of Jagannatha is concerned, so much so, that *prasada* put into one's mouth by even a man of the lowest caste, at the Anandabazar

1. According to one authority all the sisters-in-law of the Mother went with the party.

within the temple precincts, may not be refused. The Mother showed her respect for this hoary custom by putting the *prasada* into the mouths of the devotees and asking them to put it into hers. While this merry ceremony was going on, Master Mahashaya and uncle Varada came there by chance from Calcutta, and they too joined in it.

All those who came from Jayrambati except the grandmother, left again in December. The Mother continued there for some time more. Her foot was now cured of the boil, the rheumatism too, was not acute, and the body was healthy. Therefore she moved about happily visiting the sacred places such as the kitchen of Jagannatha, Gundicha Bari, Lakshmi-jala, Narendra Sarovara, Govardhan Math, etc. She also circumambulated the Jagannatha temple and bathed twice in the sea. As her mind was cheerful at this time, she spoke of many anecdotes of the Master's life and of the Dakshineswar days. After spending some time thus in the salubrious, joyous, and holy atmosphere of Puri, she returned at the end of January to Calcutta where she stayed in the old rented house on the Baghbazar Street from where the grandmother left for home a little later.

BEREAVEMENTS

Nilmadhav suffered from asthma, which became unendurable sometimes. Soon after his return from Puri, the disease became so acute that it defied treatment, and he was bed-ridden. Unmindful of her own health, ease and rest, the Mother nursed him day and night, helped by some of her own attendants. But about two months after his return from Puri, his condition became very bad; and everyone was apprehensive of the worst at any moment. Once the Mother finished the worship of the Master and the offering of food to him expeditiously and came down. Then everybody pressed her to have her meal first, assuring that nothing would happen to her uncle in the meantime. The Mother hurried through her meal and then rushed to the patient. But now everyone sat silent around the patient. With great anxiety she cried out, 'Is my uncle no more?' Who could answer? The Mother's face then looked flushed with anger and repentance at the thought that she had failed to be there at the last moment just because she listened to the foolish persuasion of others. With extreme bitterness she said, 'Why did you send me to eat that dirty stuff? I missed a last look at my uncle!' And she began sobbing like a little helpless girl who had lost her father.

When she had composed herself a little, she asked an attendant to sit near the dead body while she herself went up to bring some leaves and flowers that had been offered to the Master. These she placed on the head and chest of the body and at both the places made *japa* with her hand. Then came the time for taking out the body for cremation. Of the bearers three were brahmins and another a non-brahmin. Golap-Ma noticed this unorthodox arrangement and drawing the Mother's attention said, 'Why should a sudra touch the dead body of a brahmin?' The Mother replied, 'Sudra? Devotees do not belong to any

caste.' The cremation took place duly at Kashi Mitra's Ghat; uncle Prasanna performed the last rites (April [?] 1905).

Uncle Prasanna then lived in a tiled cottage on the Simla Street. His eldest daughter Nalini had been married at a very early age, in the beginning of January, 1900, soon after the birth of Radhu. The bridegroom was Pramathanath Bhattacharya who belonged to Goghat in the Hooghly district of Bengal. With uncle Prasanna lived his wife, two daughters—Nalini and Maku—and Pramatha. Pramatha fell ill at this time and the disease was diagnosed as double pneumonia. The Mother kept herself informed about Pramatha's condition and often visited him.

The doctor in attendance was still a young man; but owing to some family misunderstanding he had become very morose and had lost all interest in life. To relieve his mind of extreme depression, he took morphia, frequently injecting it into his body at regular intervals. One day an attendant of the Mother, who was also a friend of the doctor, took him to the Mother who had that day gone on an invitation to Master Mahashaya's house at Jhamapukur along with some devotees. When the doctor and his friend arrived, she was in the shrine, where the two were directed to proceed. The doctor had come out only with a loin-cloth on a sudden call from his friend, thinking that something was wrong with Pramatha which required his immediate presence. He had also finished his lunch. Therefore when the friend proposed on the way that he should have his initiation from the Mother, he was rather surprised and pleaded his handicap. But the friend argued that it would be better to leave the whole matter in the hands of the Mother who best knew what formalities were essential before initiation. So the doctor entered the shrine and explained everything to the Mother. Still the Mother initiated him with a *mantra*. That produced a tremendous change in him. His whole face became radiant, the black tinge at the corners of his eyes disappeared, and his mind

was filled with a new light. That day he sat again at lunch with all the devotees, and forgetting caste prejudices and thinking himself to be as good a son of the Mother as any other, shared the same food with his friend, who belonged to a lower caste. Noticing this, the Mother remarked that they looked like two sons of the same mother, to which they added, 'That's true enough, Mother; for we are your sons.' The mental condition of the doctor improved so much in course of time that he got over his misunderstanding and mental suffering, set an example to other devotees by whole-heartedly serving the Mother and the monks of the Ramakrishna Math and helping in the work of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Some photographs of the Mother were taken during her residence at the Baghbazar house. Some of these were taken at the studio of Shri B. Datta of Chitpore Road, in the beginning of April, 1905. In one of these the Mother sits amidst Sister Lakshmi, Nalini, and Radhu. Swami Virajananda had another picture taken next month at Messrs. Van Dyke's on the Chowringhee in which the Mother sits with two plants in pots, one on either side. The picture of the Mother that is worshipped nowadays and is the most well-known was taken much earlier at the request of Mrs. Ole Bull in 1898, when the Mother lived in the Bosepara Lane house. At that time Sister Nivedita and Golap-Ma attended to the hair and clothes of the Mother according to their own taste.

Besides the doctor, another devotee named Sri Lalit-mohan Chatterji came to the Mother at this time. When he had become very intimate with the devotees and had known the Mother for some time, he became eager to be initiated by her. The Mother accordingly went to his house at Chhutarpara and gave the *mantra* to him and his wife. Lalit Babu also became a very sincere friend of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and made his own life a real success by serving the Mother in various ways.

Binodbehari Som, a student of the school where Master Mahashaya taught, was introduced by him to the Master who influenced him very much. But subsequently Som entered a theatre and took to drinking under the influence of which he talked desultorily when returning home at dead of night. He knew Swami Saradananda intimately and used to call him his *dost* (chum). His friends nick-named him Padmabinode. Now, Padmabinode, when passing by the Mother's house on his way home from the theatre, used to call on his *dost*, who, however, instructed everyone neither to respond nor to open the door, lest the Mother should be disturbed. One night, getting no answer from inside the house, Padmabinode started singing under the influence of liquor:

Get up, Mother gracious, and open the door;
 Nothing is visible in the dark; and my heart ever throbs.
 How often do I call on thee, O Tara (Kali) at the pitch of my voice!
 And yet, though kind thou art forsooth, how thou behavest today!

Leaving thy child outside, thou sleepest inside;
 While crying, 'Mother', 'Mother', am I reduced to skin and
bone!
 With proper pitch, tune, modulation, and cadence in all the three
gamuts,

I call on thee so often; and still thou awakest not!
 Maybe, thou hast turned thy face because of my engrossment in play.
 Do thou look at me with upturned face, and I shan't go for play
again.

Who but a Mother can bear the burden of such a wretched son?

The plaintive appeal of the song was irresistible. The blinds of the Mother's window went up at once, and then the window itself opened wide. Padmabinode noticed this and said with delight, 'Have you got up, Mother? Have you heard your son's call? Since you've got up, take this

salute.' So saying he began to roll on the street. Then taking the dust from the street and putting it on his head he went away singing another tune,

Keep Mother Shyama (Kali) carefully concealed in your heart;
O mind, mayst thou and I only see Her, and none else.

and he repeated with some gusto,

May I see Her, and *not* my *dost*.

Next day the Mother inquired about him, and learning everything, remarked, 'See, how firm is his conviction!' Padmabinode saw the Mother in that very manner at least once again. Next morning, when her attendants remonstrated that it was not proper for her to leave her bed at that unearthly hour, she replied, 'I can't contain myself at his call.'

Not long after, Padmabinode had a severe attack of dropsy, and he had to enter a hospital. During his last moments he expressed a desire to hear the Bengali *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which was read out to him. Tears trickled down the corners of his eyes as he heard the blessed words, and he passed away into eternal silence with the Master's name on his lips. The Mother heard all this and said with evident satisfaction, 'Why should this not be so? Was he not the Master's son? He was wallowing in mud, and has now returned to the lap to which he belonged.'

The Mother's return to Jayrambati was fixed for Jyeshtha (May-June) of 1905. This was her first journey by way of Vishnupur, where she and her party alighted from the train and had their lunch at a small wayside shop. Then Brahmachari Krishnalal who had accompanied them, started back for Calcutta, while the others got into four bullock-carts in the evening. Next morning they reached Kotulpur where they cooked and had their lunch at noon. Then the Mother and Radhu got into a palanquin which followed a shorter route to Jayrambati while the others continued in the carts by a longer one via Shihar.

The Mother had not been at Jayrambati during the Jagad-dhatri worship in the previous year; and hence the celebration this year was on a grander scale. Swami Saradananda sent there all the requisites, and the Mother added grace by her presence, and solemnity by her silent prayer.

One incident of this period shows how humble in spirit the Mother was, and yet how much esteemed she was by the local people. One day, when Sri Ganesh Ghoshal of Kamarpukur, who had been a class-mate of the Master, came to visit the Mother, she proceeded to bow down before him in all reverence; but Sri Ghoshal protested vehemently that it would be very harmful for a son to be saluted by his mother; and he himself fell down on his knees and saluted her.

At the end of 1905, Brahmachari Girija (later Swami Girijananda) went from Kankurgachhi to Jayrambati with his friend Batu Babu. He was a candidate for initiation and had obtained the Mother's permission previously. When they arrived at noon, the Mother said ruefully, 'My sons, my eldest sister-in-law¹ has got an attack of cholera. Just at noon she had cooked and fed the servants, and then suddenly fell into the grip of the disease.' Uncle Prasanna was then in Calcutta. There was neither medicine nor a doctor in the village. And so, in the course of twelve hours, the aunt died. Her daughters Nalini and Maku were still very young, and had none to look after them. The Mother who had given shelter to Radhu earlier, now took these two girls also under her care.

Brahmachari Girija now thought that under such tragic conditions, propriety demanded his keeping silent over the question of initiation; hence wishing to spend the time otherwise, he approached the Mother for her permission to go out for a visit to the Goddess Vishalakshi of Anur with whose name the childhood days of the Master

1. Rampriya Devi, first wife of uncle Prasanna.

were associated. The Mother said, 'With what expectation you must have come! Finish your bath and then come. Let me tell you something at least.' Most graciously she initiated him that very day. Batu Babu had no idea of taking any initiation just then; but the Mother blessed him also with a *mantra*.

And now came the month of Magha (January-February) of 1906, when the winter in Bengal is very cold. In the morning many sat on the terrace in front of the Mother's room. The previous day was the market day at Shiromanipur from where a woman had purchased vegetables for sale at Jayrambati. She came today, and grandmother Shyamasundari bought from her some greens and vegetables in exchange for paddy, mustard seeds, etc. Then the grandmother felt somewhat out of sorts. Nevertheless she helped in husking paddy. Soon she felt so weak that she lay down under the porch of uncle Kali's house and called out to an attendant of the Mother, 'Brother, I feel I am dying; there is a reeling sensation in the brain.' The attendant was alarmed and called the Mother there; but none could believe that the old lady was really going to breathe her last so soon. The Mother and the attendant did all they could under the circumstances. The old lady said, 'I have a desire for pumpkin curry.' The Mother assured her that she had not to worry about such a trifling thing, which would be arranged when she recovered. But grandmother said that the opportunity would never come and that for the time being she wanted a little water to drink. The Mother hurriedly brought some Ganges water and put it thrice into her mouth. Then the grandmother's body became motionless. The Mother knew that the last moment had come and so made *japa* with her hand on her head and breast. Then Shyamasundari Devi quietly passed away. It was nine o'clock in the morning. The whole household broke into a mourning wail. Uncle Varada, who was in the field, hurried back home on getting the news; and then the body was cremated on the bank of the Amodar.

The virtuous lady Shyamasundari Devi had been blessed by having had the Mother of the Universe in her womb. The Holy Mother once said, 'My father was a great devotee of Rama, and a generous soul. And how kind was my mother! That is why I was born in this house.'

In the beginning, grandmother, like others, used to think of Ramakrishna as an eccentric. But as days rolled on, this notion was replaced by an indescribable sentiment of affection mixed with awe. Grandmother loved the Master's children dearly. She stocked a good variety of rice and other eatables in anticipation of their coming; and said, 'My Sarada (Swami Trigunatitananda) may come any day, and Yogen (Swami Yogananda) may come; all these things are necessary.' She also added, 'So long as I am here, there's Brahma, there's Vishnu, there's the Universal Mother, there's Siva—all are here. When I depart, they too, will go. For who else can possibly take care of them? Mine is a household of God and godly people.' The grandmother's love embraced all the little children of the village. Even on the last day of her life, she played with her grandchildren—the little ones of the village—for a very long time.

Grandmother departed from the body fully conscious, with her blessed daughter Sarada by her side. But the Holy Mother wept bitterly like any mortal child. She was motherless now; in fact she had none else to whom she could look up for a bit of affection. Father, husband, uncle, mother,—all had left her one by one. And worse still, her Yogananda, on whom she could depend, was no more; and Abhay, whom she loved dearly, had come to an untimely end. The responsibility now thrust on her shoulders was indeed very heavy. Her sorrow today knew no bounds.

Yet the world has its own norm; and time runs its course relentlessly. Moreover, those who come to lead others possess on the one hand a most tender heart which is pained at the slightest touch of other people's misery,

and on the other hand a determination to discharge their duties manfully, without being deflected from the right course under the mightiest pressure. Hence, though the Mother could be overwhelmed with sorrow, she could not be blinded by it for ever. Moreover it devolved on her in particular to arrange for the *Shraddha* (solemn obsequies) of grandmother on the eleventh day; for her brothers depended on her in such matters. As soon as the news reached Calcutta, Swami Saradananda made elaborate arrangements for the occasion; and the ceremony was well worthy of the great soul that had presented the Holy Mother to the world. Twenty-five brass pitchers, umbrellas, seats, sandals, and other things, were given away as gifts to brahmins. And the villagers, both brahmins and non-brahmins were sumptuously fed. The last wish of the grandmother was also fulfilled by cooking sufficient pumpkin curry for all.

The intense sorrow and the strain of the obsequies told on the Mother's health heavily. As a result she became emaciated and she took one full month to recover. We do not know when she left for Calcutta after this. Most probably she did so some time in March or April, 1906, when she took residence again at 2/1 Baghbazar Street. The venerable lady Gopaler Ma was then in her death-bed at the Nivedita School premises. When the Mother went to visit her a few days before she passed away, that very affectionate lady who looked upon all as her divine child Gopala, said, 'Is it you Gopala come here?' and she stretched forth her hand to take hold of something. The Mother did not understand whom she meant and what she wanted. Then the woman devotee in attendance explained that she wanted the sacred dust of the Mother's feet, who to her was none other than the Master as identified with her Gopala. The Mother had so long been revering Gopaler Ma as though she were her mother-in-law. But at that moment none cared to stand on formalities. The Mother made no objection, and the

attendant took the dust of her feet with her apron and rubbed it all over the body of Gopaler Ma. With a heavy heart the Mother returned home. Gopaler Ma passed into eternal silence on the 24th of Ashadha (beginning of July), 1906.

The Mother returned to her native village before the Jagad-dhatri worship of 1907, which was celebrated with due solemnity in the presence of Brahmachari Krishnalal and others.

GIRISHCHANDRA GHOSH

Thus far we have followed the sequence of the unfoldment of the Mother's personality from her own point of view. We must now follow by stages the gradual comprehension of that personality from the devotees' angle of vision. Most of them did not accept her as the Universal Mother from the very beginning of their discipleship. They knew her only as the wife of their guru, and so their love, respect, and responsibility towards her were based on that relationship. As a proof of this we may say, that one day a young man went to the drawing-room of Sri Kalipada Ghosh, a staunch follower of the Master, and finding no picture of the Mother there asked for the reason. As an answer Kalipada saluted the picture of the Master with folded hands and said, 'He is, indeed, our father, and he is our mother.' Not satisfied with such an explanation, the young man spoke to Girishchandra Ghosh, the well-known actor-dramatist and devotee. The latter said, 'Did we ourselves recognize her in earlier days? It was Niranjana who opened our eyes.' The outspoken Swami Niranjanananda not only accepted the Mother as divine, but also openly preached her divinity among the devotees without any reserve. The other world-renouncing young men recognized this divinity thereafter and offered her their hearts' adoration, but even so they were not so aggressive in propagating their belief. Niranjanananda was of a different temperament; the light he had, he would not hide under a bushel. As a result of this, Girish Babu and others got a faint glimpse of her greatness.

The Master once declared that Girish's faith was more than overflowing.¹ Along with others, Girish had

1. Literally, 'five annas over and above five quarters of a rupee.' Four quarters make a rupee; five quarters make it more than enough; and five annas added to them make it more than over-sufficient.

known the Mother as his guru's wife; but from the day he knew her as divine, his reverence for her blazed into white heat. The following incident gives a little insight into his mental make-up at this time. His second wife was still alive. One evening Girish was sauntering on his roof with his wife, while on the roof of Balaram Babu's house, the Holy Mother was taking the air. Girish's wife recognized the Mother and said to her husband, 'Look there, the Mother is strolling on the roof of yonder house.' Girish turned his back to that roof saying, 'No, no, mine are sinful eyes; I shan't thus look at her stealthily;' and climbed down. The Mother came to know of this later from Girish Babu's wife.

Many believe that it was to the exceptional good fortune of this wife that Girish owed his fame, his wealth, and the grace of the Master. He had two daughters and one son through her. But when she fell ill and expired (26th December, 1888) soon after the birth of her son, Girish found himself quite forlorn. He had relinquished in favour of the Master all his ideas of personal agency even in his own activities, and so he would not even lament for his wife. That would have implied a lack of faith in Providence. And yet the pang of separation was there. To forget this he now threw himself earnestly into the study of mathematics and the upbringing of his child.

There was another reason for this. He had once entreated the Master to be born as his son. The Master had then turned down the request. And yet when this child was born after the Master had left this world, Girish was firmly convinced that the Master had really answered his earnest prayer and blessed him by being born in his house. He, therefore, took the utmost care of the boy whose appearance and deportment so fascinated and attracted visitors that they could not resist the temptation of taking him in their arms and kissing him. And whenever the Holy Mother happened to come to this house, the boy rejoiced in sitting on her lap.

When the Mother was staying at Sourindra Thakur's house at Baranagore at the end of 1890, the great dramatist went there with the boy, taken there perhaps by Swami Niranjanananda. This incident had a certain bearing on the Mother's life. For though her divinity was recognized by a limited number of lay devotees like Master Mahashaya, her glory came to be openly avowed by all the devotees only after Girishchandra had done so. Earlier than that the Mother enforced her privacy so strictly that devotees could not see her, and had to satisfy themselves by saluting her in their own minds.

Girish's son, then in his third year, had not quite learned to speak and expressed himself through gestures. That day, at Sourindra Thakur's house, the boy became anxious to see the Mother who was upstairs. He pointed towards her room and went on saying 'ooh, ooh'. At first none understood him; but at last one of the Mother's attendants guessed his meaning and carried him upstairs. The boy saluted the Mother by falling at her feet, and coming down pressed his father with his usual gestures to go up. At this Girish burst out crying, 'O my dear, how can I possibly go to see the Holy Mother; for I am veritably a great sinner.' But as the boy was insistent, Girishchandra at last took him up in his arms and walked into the Mother's room, shaking and trembling all over. Falling at her feet with tearful eyes and a voice choked with emotion, he said, 'Mother, it is because of this child that I have had now a glimpse of your blessed feet.'

The boy did not live very long; he died at the age of three. Girish went to Jayrambati some time later in 1891 in search of some consolation, and spent a few months there on the advice of Swami Niranjanananda who accompanied him as his friend and philosopher. With them went Swamis Subodhananda, Nirbhayananda, and Bodhananda, with a cook and a servant. They went by way of Burdwan, Uchalan, and Kamarpukur. At Jayrambati, Girish took his bath in a pond and went straightway to

salute the Mother in his wet clothes. He was then full of thoughts of her and his whole frame quivered with emotion. As he looked up after touching the Mother's feet with his head, he saw her face for the first time in his life and exclaimed within himself with extreme surprise, 'Hey-day! It is you to be sure, Mother!' This astonishment was derived from an earlier crisis in his life. Once, young Girish, then in the grip of cholera and apparently without hope of recovery, had a glimpse of a radiant motherly figure putting some *prasada* into his mouth saying, 'Eat'. She wore a cloth with broad red borders; her whole being was effulgent with a heavenly light and the face looked wonderfully lit up by a benign smile. The *prasada* was very tasteful. When he woke up the taste was still on his tongue. He recovered very soon; but the vivid dream remained ever fresh in his mind. Today he recognized that dream-face in the Mother's, so exactly alike were the two. And today, after such a long lapse of time, he knew that it was this divine Mother who had been protecting him all along. Yet, to make assurance doubly sure, he inquired through another, for the Mother would not speak directly to him, whether she had revealed herself to him in this way on any previous occasion. The Mother admitted of having done so. Girish's doubts were not still laid at rest. Therefore, he asked her again on another occasion, 'What kind of a mother are you?' 'I am your true mother,' replied the Mother without a moment's hesitation, 'a mother not by virtue of being your guru's wife, nor because of any assumed relationship, nor by way of empty talk, but truly the mother.'

After spending two weeks there, all except Girish-chandra, Niranjanananda, and the servants, returned to Calcutta. The great poet enjoyed immensely that long stay in the village. Freed from the bustle of the city and its unendurable constraints and never-ending worries, he lived a care-free life. He walked in the fields with the farmers, took plenty of *prasada* sitting near the Mother, and

remained ever engaged in the thoughts and talks of the Master. In the evening he sat in the open meadow enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. The villagers were quick in discovering that he was the well-known actor-dramatist Girishchandra Ghosh of Calcutta; and hence they wanted to hear from his mouth the songs composed by himself. He argued that though he was a composer, he was not a singer. Nevertheless, the villagers remained importunate, and Girish had to satisfy their curiosity. The Mother overheard him very often and learnt some of the tunes. In later days, she sang the following lines from Girishchandra for the benefit of her inquisitive sons:

(Gopala) turns back and looks, as he crawls away, lest the queen
(Yashoda, his mother) should catch hold of him.
The queen says, 'hold', 'hold' in fun, and Gopala crawls further
away.

And one day, Haridas Vairagi of Desra came and sang to the tune of his violin:

What a delightful news it is, O Uma (dear daughter)!
(Dear me!) I hear from people—say if this is true, O Siva's wife—
That you have got the name Annapurna at Banaras...
(see also p. 169.)

On hearing this song, so reminiscent of the life of the Holy Mother, neither Girish and others in the outer apartment, nor the Mother inside, could check their tears.

At Jayrambati, Girish one day entered into a vehement debate with uncle Kali as to whether the Mother was divine or not. Uncle knew her only as his sister; and this was nothing untoward for him; for the Puranas tell us that though the people of the Yadu tribe mixed freely with Krishna during play and at the time of eating, yet they could not recognize him as God. On the other hand, Girishchandra's faith was not to be shaken. 'You call my sister', argued uncle Kali, 'Mother of the Universe, Creatrix of the World, and what not! Though we were born of the same womb, I don't, forsooth,

perceive a bit of it.' 'What do you mean?' demanded Girish in a firm and deep voice, 'You are a mere village brahmin's son; you have forsaken your priestly duties of performing sacrifices, reading, and teaching, and are spending your life in farming. If one should promise you a bull, you will be dancing attendance on the man for at least six months. Is it then impossible for the Great Source of all delusion to keep you labouring under the notion that she is merely your sister, for the whole of your life? Go, and if you want freedom here and hereafter, take refuge at the Mother's feet at once. I say, go!' There was a force in what he said which impelled uncle Kali to go to the Mother and seek refuge at her feet just as Girish had suggested. But the Mother protested saying, 'O dear Kali, I am evermore the same sister. What's this you are doing now?' Uncle Kali, therefore, returned with his earlier conviction. But Girish was not so easily to be put off. He tried to send Kali to the Mother again. But uncle Kali refused to go to her.

The Mother's care and affection for Girish was unbounded. Milk was not easily available in that village, but as Girish could not do without his early morning tea, the Mother searched the village through for a little quantity of milk. Girish also noticed that his bed-sheet was always white as snow. He did not know who kept it so clean. At last he found the Mother washing it with soap at the pond. The Mother also cooked delicious dishes for him and sat by him and saw to it that he was fully satisfied.

But if she was all affection for him, she was not blind to his shortcomings. Girish had had such bitter experiences of the world that he threatened to renounce everything. But the Mother did not approve. Girish then resorted to the logical and vehement reasoning of which his keen intellect and poetic tongue were capable, and which was calculated to sweep anyone off his feet.

But the Mother successfully withstood all such argumentation, till at last Girish had to admit defeat and give up his idea.

Girish took the opportunity to spend some days at the birthplace of the Master. The Mother also went there with the party. The long association with the Holy Mother and the sacred places of Jayrambati and Kamarpukur brought the much-needed solace to Girish's lacerated heart and he returned to Calcutta to resume his literary work with fresh vigour and a clearer spiritual outlook.

Girishchandra was not only a keen observer whose poetic eyes drew in the pictures of all pure and fine things and kept them ever deposited in his heart, but also when the occasion arose, he could reproduce them vividly in words for the edification, delectation, and inspiration of others. When the Mother lived on the godown of the Sarkarbari Lane in Baghbazar (1896), Girish was a frequent visitor and came to salute the Mother. On the day that the Mother was leaving for Jayrambati (after the worship of Kali) the great poet came, and silently went up with Swami Yogananda. The others, who had gathered there, followed them. Girish prostrated himself before the Mother and said with folded hands, 'Mother, when I come to you I feel like a little child coming to its own mother. Had I been a 'grown-up' son, I would have served my mother. But it is quite different here; you serve us and we do not serve you. You are going to Jayrambati to serve the people, even by cooking food for others in the village kitchen. How can I serve you, and what do I know about serving the Mother?' His voice became choked and his whole face flushed with emotion as he spoke. At last checking himself a little and turning to the others who stood behind him, he said, 'It is difficult for human beings to believe that God can incarnate in a human form like our own. Can you realize that you are standing before the Mother of the Universe in the form of a village woman?'

Yet she is the Mother of the Universe—Maha-maya, Maha-Sakti—appearing on the earth for the salvation of all creatures and at the same time exemplifying the ideal of true motherhood.’ The words were sublime, inspiring, and calculated to electrify the atmosphere. All listened with rapt attention, and then they followed the Mother to the railway station to bid her a respectful farewell.

Girish Babu at first accepted the Mother as his guru’s wife, and then as Mother and Divinity. After close observation and acquaintance he not only came to entertain for her a deep devotion that impelled him to cry from the housetop her glory, but he also developed the strength of an innocent mind that enabled him to behave towards her like a guileless child. His solicitude for the Mother’s comfort was so great that she said, ‘He at one time defrayed all my expenses for a year and a half. How could he make a large contribution? He was never a rich man.’ Here is another instance of his loving devotion to the Mother. The Mother once returned from home, after a long time, accompanied by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. The train was to have reached Howrah station from Vishnupur in the morning; and so Swami Brahmananda suggested to Swami Premananda that they might go to the station to convey their respects to her. Swami Premananda readily agreed. But at Howrah, the train was late by three hours. The two Swamis were in a fix for a little while, for the problem of transport between Belur and Howrah in those days was a difficult one. Besides, it was a summer day, and all, including the two Swamis, who had come to meet the Mother, felt uncomfortable. Still, undaunted they decided to stay on. The train steamed in long after the scheduled time and Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma carefully helped the Mother to get down from the train. But as soon as Golap-Ma’s eyes fell on the two Swamis, she went to Swami Brahmananda and reproved him saying, ‘Well, Maharaj, have you lost your senses? The Mother has travelled through this gruelling heat; and now if even

you create a muddle by coming here to salute her, then what should I say of the others?' The innocent Swami felt guilty and dared not go a step forward. Seeing him in such a plight, the others naturally stood where they were. The Mother was taken to Baghbazar. The two Swamis now decided that though salutation was thus ruled out, it was quite in the fitness of things for them to follow the Mother to see if adequate arrangements were made for her there. So they got into a carriage and arrived at the Baghbazar house where they sat quietly in a room below. Just then Girish came to the Mother. He was scantily dressed and the half shirt that covered his body was wet with perspiration. Finding the two Swamis there, he made inquiries about the Mother. Though he was talking in a low voice, Golap-Ma heard him and hurried down and began haranguing them again as she had done at the station. But unfortunately the scene had now changed and the chief character now on the stage was no longer Swami Brahmananda but Girishchandra Ghosh. And just as Golap-Ma fired her shots at him saying, 'I am like a duck in thunder at this wonderful devotion of Girish Ghosh. I say, Girish Babu, you like to see the Mother forsooth! But the Mother has come through this gruelling heat, and when it is but reasonable for her to take a little rest, you come even here to pester her;' Girish turned a deaf ear to all this, and at once started ascending the stairs calling to the two Swamis, 'Come, come, Maharaj (Brahmananda), Baburam (Premananda), let us go to see the Mother.' And as Golap-Ma repeated her vehement protest, Girish Babu looked back and snapped at her, 'That shrew of a woman argues, indeed, that I have come to pester the Mother; whereas the Mother would feel relieved after seeing the faces of her sons after such a long absence.' They all went up. The Mother received them cordially and blessed them. In the meantime Golap-Ma too, came up and complained with tearful eyes, 'To think that Girish Babu should talk to me

thus!' The Mother turned to her and said, 'Have I not warned you off and on not to be critical of my sons?' Girish Babu went down after saluting the Mother like a victor.

The time for the Durga worship of 1907 was drawing near. Girish and his sister Dakshina requested the Mother, then at Jayrambati, to grace the occasion with her presence at their house, and give it an added charm. They offered to bear all the expenses of her journey. The Mother was then in bad health owing to malaria, but she could not resist the call of such devout souls. So arrangements were made for the journey to Calcutta. On the appointed day she started with Radhu and Radhu's mother. On reaching Vishnupur she found Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji waiting there for them with all arrangements for their food and comfort. At that time, Calcutta was in the grip of a communal trouble and the town was without any light at night. So they had advanced to Vishnupur to be sure of her safe journey. The whole party boarded the train after food and reached Howrah after nightfall. Lalit Babu's carriage was ready at the station. The Mother and her relatives entered it while others sat or stood on the coach-box and the footboards and thus conducted her safely to Balaram's house where she was to stay.

Girish's sister came the next day and saluting the Mother said that by condescending to come she had solved a problem, for Girish was sulky and argued that since the worship would be a meaningless pageant in the Mother's absence, he would not have it that year unless she came.

The worship commenced after a few days, the initial ceremonies being held in the Mother's presence. At the house of Balaram Babu, again, began a second worship. From early morning of the first day of worship began pouring in a stream of devotees with flowers in their hands to be offered at the feet of the Mother, which she accepted sitting quietly for hours together. Then she was

requested to go to Girishchandra's house, where she stayed till the end of the day's worship.

On the second day of the celebration also the Mother accepted the worship of the devotees in the houses of Balaram and Girish. She was not well then; still she sat the whole time, covering herself with a cotton sheet. She disappointed none. But the strain of the two consecutive days made her so ill that it was decided that she would not be present at night at the most important worship at the moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, when the demon Mahisha was killed by the Goddess. That was a sore disappointment to them all and terribly depressing for Girish. But as the blessed moment approached the Mother decided to witness the worship and with the women devotees, she walked to the backdoor of Girish's house, where she knocked and announced, 'Here I am.' The news spread with electric speed and created fresh enthusiasm. The maidservant opened the door. Girish heard with the greatest delight that the living Divine Mother was at his door to accept his worship, notwithstanding all personal inconveniences. A little while ago he had been telling his friends in the drawing-room upstairs that his going down to the place of worship was vain inasmuch as the Mother would not be there. Now at the happy news he said with a choked voice and gasping breath, 'I thought that my worship had come to nought, and just now the Mother knocks at the door and announces, "Here I am".' They all hurried down. As the Mother stood at the north-west corner fixing her eyes on the image of the Goddess, the devotees approached her and offered handfuls of flowers at her feet. The third day's worship, too, passed off merrily. All the three days the Mother accepted the flower offerings of all her children, known or unknown, not excepting even the actors and actresses of Girish's theatrical troupe.

After the celebration, the Mother was eager to return home; but the devotees would not allow her before the

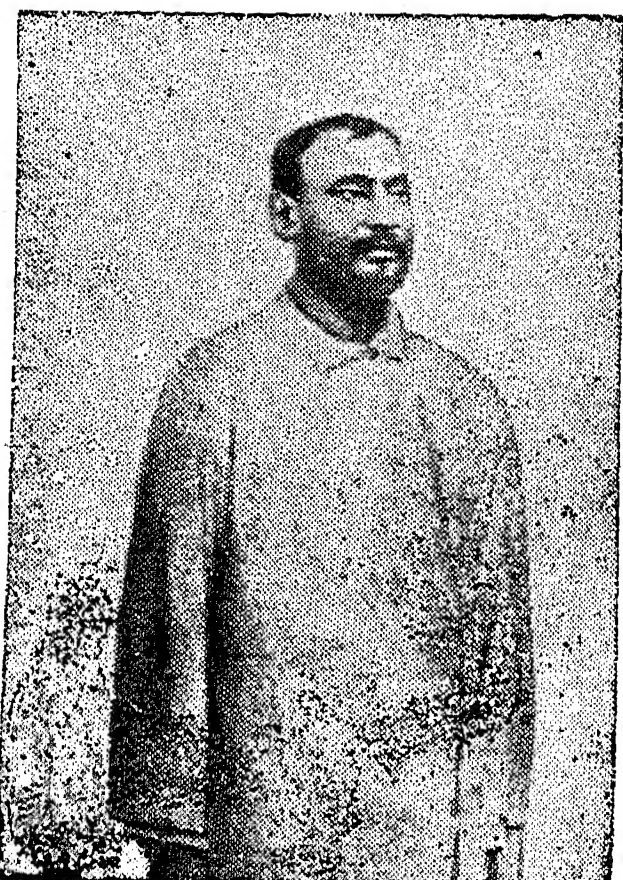
worship of Kali. Accordingly, she prolonged her stay and left Calcutta on the 24th of Kartika (10th November). She went home via Vishnupur. The people at Jayram-bati were informed well in advance to keep ready a palanquin at Desra. But the uncles did nothing, and as a consequence the Mother and her companions had great difficulty in walking home in a dark night. We have already narrated this event in the chapter 'A Self-imposed Limitation'. The Mother's health was bad at that time, and yet she had to be busy about her brothers' household duties. Hence the Calcutta devotees sent Golap-Ma and Kusumkumari with her. Golap-Ma left for Calcutta when the Mother had recovered a little.



HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-TWO



HOLY MOTHER AT FIFTY-EIGHT



SWAMI YOGANANDA



SWAMI SARADANANDA

SWAMI SARADANANDA

Many years had elapsed since the Master departed from this life, during which period the number of disciples of the Mother had increased considerably. Many of them visited her at Jayrambati. Among them, Dr. Jnanendranath Kanjilal went there in the first quarter of 1908 with some essential medicines for the free treatment of the villagers, many of whom were benefited by his presence. His name having spread to remote villages, every day the crowd at his door was quite considerable. Noticing this, the Mother said with pride. 'My gifted son has come; why shouldn't people gather?' The villagers expressed their gratitude to the doctor in various ways, and at the time of his departure the Mother saw him off personally, accompanying him to the border of the village.

The Mother was in indifferent health in those days. She had a renewed attack of her old trouble, rheumatism; and in addition to this, she was attacked by malaria soon after Dr. Kanjilal left. The temperature rose so high that it caused grave anxiety to all. During one night, she was thus talking in a delirium: 'I have to go. No. Why?—For Radhi. Well, let it be so.' It seemed as though she was talking with the Master; the Mother wanted release; but the Master asked her to stay on for Radhu's sake. However that might have been, Dr. Kanjilal had left behind certain specific medicines for certain common diseases, one of which was administered to her whereupon she recovered.

Even while the Mother lived in her village home, Swami Saradananda kept himself informed of her welfare through letters or messengers, and sent her money as occasion demanded. Furthermore, he was always eager to keep her in Calcutta; but he would not do anything against her slightest wish. This time, too, when she fell ill, he proposed more than once to bring her to Calcutta; but the Mother refused. In the meantime, there

had been a great change in Calcutta. When the Mother came to Calcutta, she had often to live in the houses of devotees. She was, of course, noted for her endurance and adaptability; but it pained Swami Saradananda to find her personal freedom smothered in others' houses. Moreover, of late, many of her relatives and women devotees had been moving about with her; and for most householders it was difficult to accommodate so many people at a time or for any long period. The expenses, too, were not inconsiderable. To arrange for rented houses was not easy for penniless monks like Swami Saradananda; and suitable houses were not always available at the proper time or place. Often enough, the houses were away from the Ganges thereby causing inconvenience to the Mother who had to have her daily bath in its holy waters. Besides, a permanent house was necessary to locate the offices for the Bengali periodical *Udbodhan* and to accommodate its staff. Taking into consideration all these factors, Swami Saradananda decided to launch on a bold scheme—he would have a permanent brick-built house at Baghbazar.

Kedarchandra Das had gifted away to the Belur Math on the 18th of July, 1906, a small plot of land (measuring about 260 sq. yards.) on the Gopal Neogi Lane, in Baghbazar, not very far from the Ganges. At first it was proposed to have a tiled shed on this land for the *Udbodhan*. But Swami Saradananda stood for a small brick structure. To start with he had in hand a meagre fund of Rs. 2,700/- got together through the sale of Swami Vivekananda's books, which amount, it was found on calculation, would not carry him beyond the foundation. Still he was sanguine of finishing the structure through loans. Such boldness did not go unchallenged, to be sure. But depending on the Mother's grace, he borrowed Rs. 5,700/- and started building at the end of 1907. But as the work proceeded, he had to borrow more money; and at last through his determination and bold execution, the *Udbodhan* got, at a cost of eleven thousand rupees, a

permanent house to which it was shifted at the end of 1908. This house had then six rooms on the ground floor, three on the first, and one on the second, or ten rooms in all. The lowest rooms were meant for the *Udbodhan* and the others for the Mother and her companions. The Mother was at Jayrambati at that time and did not like to come even though the news of the completion of the house reached her.

One incident which took place in the middle of March 1909, is worth mentioning here. Swami Yogavinode of Kankurgachhi, celebrated the Master's birthday at Kamarpukur at that time, and to make it a complete success took the Holy Mother there. She enjoyed it immensely.

Just after the celebration there arose a new situation at Jayrambati. For meeting it adequately, the Holy Mother requisitioned the services of the most dependable and level-headed of her sons, Swami Saradananda. The Mother had been acting as the guardian of her brothers who lived in a joint family. But as the brothers and their wives grew up and their families expanded, differences and tensions developed, as a result of which the brothers wanted to be separated; and the Mother also found that to be the only logical solution. For bringing about this settlement Swami Saradananda was invited to help with his personal presence.

On the 23rd of March, 1909, Swami Saradananda started for Jayrambati in the company of Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, and a Brahmachari and arrived there the next day. Then he spent a few days in visiting such places, as Navisan, Kamarpukur, etc. A remarkable trait in the Swami's character to be noticed at this time was that, though he had come evidently for a settlement of worldly affairs, he spent most of his time in talking about the Master or editing the *Jnana-yoga* of Swami Vivekananda.

The Mother used to be very busy at the time. In addition to her daily normal duty, she cooked some dishes

morning and evening for Swami Saradananda. And she attended to such minute details as levelling the unpaved courtyard where water might have created a depression. Seeing her so busy, the Brahmachari wanted to help her. But the Swami, who knew better, warned him that if he did any such thing, it would reflect discredit on the aunts who would be accused of being unmindful of their old sister-in-law.

When some days had thus passed away, Sri Kedar-nath Datta¹ of Koalpara was brought there to make measurement of the landed property. Kedar went on with his work, while Swami Saradananda's mind still followed its wonted habit of spiritual aloofness. After the lands had been measured, there arose the question of division, in which Swami Saradananda had to play a vital part. The documents were all in the keeping of uncle Kali; but uncle Prasanna wanted them to be in his own custody. Ultimately he proposed a division of the papers; Swami Saradananda, however, decided that lands and documents would be simultaneously dealt with. Uncle Prasanna was not reconciled to this; therefore, taking advantage of the Swami's momentary absence from the room where the talk was proceeding, he tried to snatch away the papers from his brother, and as a consequence a scuffle ensued. But as Swami Saradananda again stepped in, uncle Prasanna sat down gloomily. In fact, there was a repetition of what usually happens under such circumstances in many a joint family on the eve of disruption. And yet Swami Saradananda remained unruffled like the immobile Himalayas; and relying fully on his judgment and direction, the Mother kept her mind absolutely above these worldly turmoils. Drawing attention to this equipoise of the Mother based as it was on a spiritual insight, the Swami said to the Brahmachari, 'You have seen us often enough

1. Later on he became a monk under the name Swami Keshavananda and head of the monastery at Koalpara, which he had started as a lay worshipper.

—how we flare up at seeing our slightest wish disregarded. But look at the Mother. What a hell her brothers are creating and yet how calm and collected she is at all times! ’

When the terms of the partition had been worked out, they had to be incorporated in a document. The arbitrators were Swami Saradananda, Sri Saradaprasad Chatterji of Tajpur, and Sri Shambhuchandra Roy of Jibta. Sri Chatterji asked the Mother through her brothers which house she would prefer to live in. She sent her answer: ‘Rats bore holes and snakes live therein.’ Sarada Babu, a man of the world, was not impressed by such sentimentalism; and he had it explained to her that the whole property—lands, houses, and all was being partitioned, and so if any house was not set apart for her, where would she live in Jayrambati? This time, too, the Mother’s answer was, ‘Some days I shall live in Prasanna’s house and some days in Kali’s.’ Without further ado, Sri Chatterji allotted to uncle Prasanna’s share the house where the Mother lived. The documents were executed and duly registered at Kotulpur. Then the uncles took possession of their respective shares. At last the Mother heaved a sigh of relief and told Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma that she would go to Calcutta. Accordingly, Swami Saradananda fixed Friday, the 21st of May, as the day of departure.

It was decided that the bullock-carts carrying the party would reach Koalpara at four o’clock in the afternoon, and after a brief halt would proceed to Vishnupur. Of the four carts, one was occupied by the Holy Mother, Radhu and Maku; the second by Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma; the third by Swami Saradananda; and the last by the Brahmachari and one Ashu from Jayrambati. When the carts reached Koalpara at about eight or nine o’clock in the night, the devotees of the village unyoked the bullocks from the Mother’s cart and drew it themselves till they arrived at the house of Sri Kedarnath Datta. The Mother was taken for rest to the shrine of Kedar while others went to the local school-house. On inquiry

about the delay, it was learnt that the wheels of the carts got stuck up in the mud near the river at Shihar. The devotees had not anticipated such a long delay, and had arranged for light refreshments only. As it did not at all strike them that something should be done for the night meals, they went on talking leisurely with the Mother. The Jayrambati party, on the contrary, took it for granted that even without any suggestion from their side, the Koalpara people would arrange for their night meals. As a result of this misunderstanding time rolled on uselessly, when at last it dawned on the Jayrambati people that they had waited uselessly and it was better to move forward. Therefore, at the instance of the elders the Brahmachari cried out from the entrance of Kedar's house: 'It is getting extremely late.' The whole party at once hurried to the carts, which started immediately for Vishnupur. They halted at Kotulpur at about ten o'clock to procure from a sweetmeat seller some food with which they appeased their hunger in the temple premises of Shantinatha Siva. They reached Vishnupur next morning and entrained for Calcutta at night.

The 23rd of May, 1909, is a red letter day in the annals of the premises No. 1, Udbodhan Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta; for on that day the Holy Mother set her sacred foot there. Swami Saradananda felt all his labour repaid when he saw the Mother established in her own house. The situation of the house might not have been attractive, but it was after the Mother's mind in many ways. The land in front was then an open field without any hutment, and served as a grazing ground for stray cattle. The Ganges was near at hand, a full view of which could be had from the terrace. And as one's eyes extended far to the north, one could have a sight of the tops of the tall village trees in the outskirts of the city. The Mother was overjoyed to see the house and blessed Swami Saradananda heartily.

On the altar in the shrine was placed the Master's picture over which was hung a silk canopy made by Sister

Nivedita. In the adjoining room there was a new couch for the Mother and near it an old bedstead for Radhu. The Mother disapproved of the arrangement saying, 'I can't live separated from the Master, nor is it proper.' So the two beds were placed in the shrine-room. The first night passed off this way. But next day, the Mother said that she felt uncomfortable on the couch without Radhu alongside of her, and Radhu, too, did not feel happy when alone. Accordingly, the couch was taken out and only the bedstead remained for both of them to sleep on. Thus in all affairs, big or small, Swami Saradananda considered himself a servant of the Mother and was ever ready to fulfil her slightest wish.

Here we must adduce certain facts to illustrate the devotion that the Swami had for the Mother, and the tenderness she had for him; for otherwise one cannot comprehend the important role that Swami Saradananda played in this divine drama.

In the beginning of 1920, during Swami Saradananda's stay in Banaras, when the Mother's going to Calcutta became imperative, she coolly said, 'There can be no question of my going to Calcutta unless Sarat is there. To whom am I to go? While I am there, if Sarat happens to say, "Mother, I am going out for a few days," I shall say, "Tarry a little, my son; let me first step out from this place and then you can start." Who but Sarat will bear my burden?' On another occasion she said, 'I can stay at that place so long as Sarat is there. After him I don't see any one who can shoulder my responsibility. Sarat can do so in every way. Sarat is my burden-bearer.' The hearer asked the Mother, 'Can't Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) do so?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'Rakhal is not of that temperament. He can't face troubles. He can do so intellectually or through some one. He is of a totally different make-up.' The questioner pursued, 'What about Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda)?' 'No,' replied the Mother, 'not even he.' 'But, as a matter of fact, he

is running the (Belur) Math.' 'Let it be so,' replied the Mother. 'Think of the responsibilities for a woman! He can make inquiries from a distance.' On another day she said, 'It is extremely difficult, my child, to stand up against my heavy pressure. Nobody excepting Sarat will be able to shoulder my burden.'

A devotee from Ranchi came and told the Mother, 'I have come to take you to Ranchi for some days. The fixing up of a house and other things have been arranged for.' 'Does Sarat know?' inquired she. 'No' replied the devotee. 'Then there can be no going for me,' clinched she. 'Sarat came and returned disappointed. Let me go to Calcutta first. If he advises, then this will be considered.' 'But, Mother,' pleaded the devotee, 'we have already made the arrangements.' The mother answered, 'Why did you arrange without informing me first?' When the devotee had left, she said, 'Look here, my child, people think it is very easy to take me. They know only sensation-mongering. On another occasion they printed leaflets that I would go to Dacca, though I knew nothing of it. They can serve me for a couple of days or so. Is it easy to assume my responsibility? I have yet to see any one except Sarat who can bear that burden. He is my Vasuki (the mythological serpent). What a lot of work he is doing by spreading his thousand hoods; wherever there is any rainfall, he spreads his umbrella (hood) to protect me.'

Sri Surendranath Mazumdar once approached the Mother with his brother Sri Sourendranath Mazumdar for initiation. As the Mother was ill, she asked them to come a few days later. But finding Surendra inflexible, she said, 'Go to Sarat; it will be as he advises.' The devotee still expostulated, 'We don't know anybody else; it is to you that we have come, and you must grant us this.' 'What do you mean?' said the Mother in reply. 'Sarat is my crest-jewel. It shall be as he will decide.' The Mother spoke with such emphasis that the devotees found no way out but to obey; and hence they approached Swamī

Saradananda for his approval. But he too argued that it was impossible to arrange for initiation so long as the Mother was in ill health. Then the devotees related the whole incident, on hearing which the Swami kept silent for a while and then said, 'You say that the Mother spoke thus? Well, you come prepared on such a day.'

Though Swami Saradananda received so much honour from one whom he considered the sheet-anchor of his life, yet he was never proud. He was then writing his masterpiece, the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, with the proceeds of which he hoped to liquidate the debt he had incurred. One day as he opened his papers to begin the daily work, a devotee came and prostrated himself before him. The Swami looked up and inquired with an amused smile, 'Why this ceremonious salute of yours?' The devotee replied, 'How you talk, sir? Whom else shall I salute if not you?' Humility incarnate as the Swami was, he replied, 'I also implore and wait for her favour by whom you have been blessed. She can even at this moment seat you here in my place if she so desires.'

The Swami considered himself a mere door-keeper at the Mother's house. But this self-imposed duty was not always a pleasant one. One summer noon Sri Surendranath Roy, a devotee from Barisal, walked from his residence on Harrison Road to the Mother's house, a distance of about three miles, and arrived there just when the Mother had come in and was taking rest. Though Surendra was tired and wet with perspiration, he was so eager to see the Mother that he tried to walk straight up the stairs without waiting for formalities. But there stood Swami Saradananda blocking the way and saying, 'I can't allow you to go to the Mother now; she has just returned and is tired.' 'Is the Mother a monopoly of yours?' blurted out the devotee in a fit of ill humour and walked up pushing the Swami aside. But once in the Mother's presence, he became penitent and thought, 'Bless God, that I may not meet him when going down.' He related the whole inci-

dent to the Mother, who consoled him saying that neither could her children be really guilty, nor could her sons be offended. Still he descended with trepidation and a guilty conscience to find to his dismay the Swamy still there at his post. Surendra saluted him and begged to be forgiven for the offence. But Swami Saradananda embraced him warmly and said, 'What offence can there be? Can one see the Mother unless one is so earnest?'

Within a few weeks after her arrival at the new house, the Mother had an attack of chicken-pox (middle of June 1909), for the treatment of which she was put under a priest of the Sitala temple in Baghbazar Street. The brahmin came every day and the Mother bowed down before him after throwing the hem of her cloth round her neck like a devout lady, and took the dust of his feet. One day an attendant remonstrated that it ill befitted her to be so obsequious; moreover, the brahmin might as well be loose in character. The Mother merely replied, 'The fact is that he is a brahmin in spite of everything. One should have due respect for his robes; the Master did not, in fact, come to destroy.' When she recovered, she told Swami Shantananda, 'My body is so weak that I can't undertake a fast; you do so on my behalf for Shitala's favour and offer worship to Her.' The Swami fasted as he was directed and worshipped Shitala near Chitpore.

After recovery, the Mother used to be taken in Lalit Babu's carriage to different places along with Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. Thus she visited the Parshwanatha temple, Ramrajatala, Navagopal Babu's house in Howrah and many such places. She went twice to the Yogodyana at Kankurgachhi (21st of August and 6th of September). She was present on the 12th of September at the Minerva Theatre where the *Pandava-Gaurava* was staged. When the Divine Mother appeared and the song 'Look at the goddess who enchants the heart of Shiva' etc., began, she fell into *samadhi*. Girishchandra enacted the role of Kanchuki in the performance.

Golap-Ma now shifted permanently to the Mother's new house, and she slept with the mad aunt in the room adjoining the Mother's room to the west. In that room the Mother made betel rolls and rubbed oil on her body before bath. The southern room was then used for dining purposes. Yogin-Ma used to come twice every day and lend a helping hand to Golap-Ma in all kinds of domestic duties such as measuring out stores and dressing vegetables for the kitchen.

During the Mother's stay in the new house there was a *Kirtana* by Sri Jatindranath Mitra at the house of the Dattas at 1, Lakshmi Datta Lane. The Mother and some women devotees went there on invitation. Jatindra was not a professional singer, but he had a sweet voice. The subject for the *kirtana* that day was the separation of the *gopis*, the sweethearts of Krishna, from him. It was all a wail of agony, and all were impressed both by the melody and by the sentiments. The Holy Mother, behind the screen, was in a state of semi-consciousness. The time now came for the performer to depart, for he had to catch a train for another place. Finding that the sitting was about to be closed with a final song of separation, the Mother, still in her spiritual afflatus, had it communicated to the singer that the *kirtana* should end with a song of union. Jatindra obliged her and took leave. But the last song, with its charming sentiments, tune, cadences, and richness of voice carried the Mother's mind to another level of existence, so much so, that she sat quietly where she was, totally lost to the environment. Golap-Ma, who was acquainted with such inebriation lifted up the Mother laying hold of her hands and led her to the carriage after some nominal refreshment. She noticed that the Mother had still no control over her feet which faltered at every step; and so she had to be bodily lifted to the carriage. On reaching the 'Udbodhan' house, she was led up the stairs by two of her attendants to the shrine-room, where, too, she stood still without a wink in her eyes and any

response to outer call. Noticing this, Golap-Ma remarked, 'I witnessed this mood of the Mother at Vrindaban, and here I see it again.' Finding that the Mother's mind refused to return to the normal plane, the devotees decided that since she had incarnated as a Mother for the sake of her children, the call 'Mother' might bring her round. So one attendant kept on repeating that word in her ears till there was some quivering of the body and then she said in a clear tone, 'Why, my son?' The devotees now drew sighs of relief, and the Mother then engaged herself in offering food to the Master in the normal way.

Swami Saradananda's works were multifarious — the service of the Mother, Secretaryship of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, writing of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* for the repayment of the loan, and courteous reception of the devotees coming to pay their respects to the Mother. Over and above all these, he sang for the Mother whenever ordered by her. When the evening service was over and she had finished her *japa*, she sent word that she would like to hear a few devotional songs. The musical instruments were near at hand in the drawing-room which also served as the Swami's office. He got hold of somebody to play on them and sang with a sweet voice such songs about the Divine Mother or about Shiva as the Mother liked.

The Mother spent about six months in the new house and then left for Jayrambati on the 16th of November, 1909. In the same year, on the 14th of December, the Swami purchased an adjacent plot measuring about 100 sq. yds. for Rs. 1,800/- for the extension of the house. Later on, at the beginning of 1915, the present house of the Holy Mother was completed by adding a few more rooms to the earlier ones.

On her way home, the Mother got down at Koalpara. The devotees of the place spread lotuses over the path that she was to tread. She walked over them to the place of resting. There she had her bath and some light refreshment

and then started for home. She visited Koalpara again on her return journey to Calcutta after some seven or eight months. Kedar's mother accompanied her to Calcutta, and the rumour went round that the Mother intended to go to the South on a pilgrimage.

She stayed in her Calcutta house till the beginning of December. It was very cold then, and the devotees wanted her to put on a warm Guernsey frock. Accordingly, a good frock was obtained from a foreign shop for Rs. 10/- given by Swami Saradananda. The Mother was apparently delighted to have it and used it for three days. But on the fourth day, she spoke out her mind frankly, 'My son, is it becoming of a woman to wear a frock? And yet I have worn it for three days to please you.' With these words she took it off and never again wore it. But though she did not use any frock or bodice, she wrapped her cloth round her body and tied it into a fine knot under the arms in such a way that the whole body remained covered. In fact, it was remarkable how she avoided luxury despite her command over resources and how she maintained her old-fashioned, rural simplicity in the midst of metropolitan finery.

IN THE SOUTH

For one reason or another the date of the Mother's departure for the South Indian pilgrimage was repeatedly being postponed. However, Balaram's wife Krishnabhavini Devi had been cherishing the desire for a long time; and she also entertained the hope of taking the Holy Mother to their estate at Kothar in Orissa and keeping her there for some time. It was finally settled that the Mother would start for Kothar on the 18th of Agrahayana (November-December), 1910, with Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother (Krishnabhavini) and his aunt, the mad aunt Surabala and her daughter Radhu, Brahmachari Shukul (Swami Atmananda), Brahmachari Krishnalal, Sri Ramakrishna Bose, and other devotees. The Mother and her women companions travelled by second-class while the men travelled by inter class. At Bhadrak station Tulasiram, brother of Swami Premananda, was present with men and palanquins and conducted them to Ramakrishna Babu's estate office. After some rest, they went to Kothar, about eighteen miles away. Swami Achalananda joined them there in a few days. The whole party felt immensely happy at this place; but the condition of the mad aunt Surabala worsened owing to the mental strain consequent on living in a stranger's house. Hence she had to be sent back to Jayrambati.

One member of the Mother's party had adopted a very strict regimen for himself for a couple of months, his argument being that he was following the Mother in her austerity. But the Mother one day served plenty of good food on his plate despite his protest and advised him to eat it all. The devotee obeyed for the time being; but in the afternoon he asked the Mother in the course of a discussion, 'Why do you deny yourself the things you serve me so plentifully?' The Mother replied, 'Do I eat through one mouth? Don't be silly. I tell you, you shall eat.' From that day his hesitation was over.

Because of the Mother's presence, the worship of Saraswati was performed that year with great eclat. On that occasion, Ramakrishna Babu and his wife took *mantra* from the Mother. Three devotees from Shillong—Suren-drakanta Sarkar, Hemantakumar Mitra, and Birendrakumar Mazumdar—were initiated on the same day. Sri Devendranath Chatterji, postmaster of Kothar, who had embraced Christianity in youth under a blind impulse, now felt repentant, and wishing to return to the Hindu fold, consulted many about the possibility of a reconversion. The news reached the ears of the Mother who opined that if he performed a purificatory rite before the image of Radha-Shyama-Chand, the tutelary deity of the Kothar family, on the eve of the Saraswati worship, and then recited the *Gayatri mantra* and wore the sacred thread he would be re-established in his brahminhood. Following her injunctions, Devendra Babu shaved his head, performed the purificatory rite, and received the *Gayatri mantra* and the sacred thread from Brahmachari Krishnalal. Then he approached the Mother in all humility for initiation, which she gladly granted him on the day of the worship of Saraswati, and blessed him by presenting him a piece of cloth.

On the night of the worship there was an opera in which there was no dialogue but only music, dance, and a little acting. Two boys, who played the leading roles of Radha and Krishna, had such sweet voices and charming poses, that the Mother was highly attracted and wanted the performance to be repeated the next day. Ramakrishna Babu gladly complied. The immersion of the Devi's image was also put off to the third day, worship being performed again on the second.

One incident at Kothar is highly illuminating. The Mother used to take some rest after the midday meal, and then she sat in the rear of the house with an attendant, to have her letters written. A few days after the above incidents, the attendant found on going there for his duty

that the Mother sat absent-mindedly with her legs outstretched and eyes looking vacantly at something at a distance. After spending about a quarter of an hour in this mood she woke up to her surroundings and finding the attendant there, asked, 'How long have you been here?' 'Not long', replied he. The Mother then went on in her own mood, 'To come down again and again! Is there no respite? Siva and Sakti move together; where there is Siva, there is Sakti — there's no escape! Yet people don't understand.' The talk continued in this strain for a pretty long time. Among other things the Mother said that the Master has to incarnate from age to age for the good of his creatures; for they are his to be sure. In this connection she alluded to one of her personal experiences. She once saw that the Master had become everything — the blind, the maimed, all were he; the miseries of the creatures were his; and so the Mother too, had to share in the alleviation of their sufferings. When her heart was caught up in this flow of infinite compassion, she had to forgo her rest and sleep, and it seemed to her then that the only rational course to follow was to give up personal comfort and think out means for the welfare of all creatures. As a consequence when all were resting, she knew no repose. As the talk flowed on thus on a transcendental level, the vesper bells of the temple apprised her of the time of the day, and she rose hurriedly for the evening services.

It was arranged that from Kothar the Mother would go on a pilgrimage to Rameshwara in the extreme south. When the proposal was first mooted, the Mother said, 'I shall go; my father-in-law went there.' When the final decision had been taken, Swami Ramakrishnananda in Madras and Swami Saradananda in Calcutta were informed. Swami Saradananda heartily approved of it, and Swami Ramakrishnananda extended a cordial invitation, intimating at the same time his willingness to shoulder all responsibility. So it was settled that the pilgrims would start in the middle of February. The party consisted of

Holy Mother, Brahmacharis Shukul and Krishnalal, Golap-Ma, Ramakrishna Babu's mother and aunt, Kedar's mother, Radhu, and the attendant mentioned earlier, as also the mad aunt Surabala who was brought back by the Mother on the eve of the departure. They started by the south-bound Madras Mail, Ramakrishna Babu accompanying them up to the Khurda Road junction, from where he went to Puri.

Leaving Khurda Road behind, the train proceeded south-west and steamed along the shores of the vast Chilka lake over whose surface ripples danced under the soft morning breeze. Here and there, cranes waking with the dawn were searching for food in shallow water or darting across the blue sky in formation. Round the small islands that dotted the lake, flew various kind of birds such as the *nilakanthas* (blue-necked jays). At the sight of the latter, the Mother became overjoyed like a girl and saluted with folded hands, for such a sight of the bird augured well. With the appearance of the sun, white masses of vapour of various shapes began to rise up and lend an eerie atmosphere to the scene. The train speeded on, and the passengers looked out through the windows towards the fast changing landscape, the vast expanse of the lake giving place to wooded undulating land. Gradually, at eight in the morning the train reached Berhampore, the head-quarters of the Ganjam district. The Bengali Manager of Messrs Kelner and Company was present at the platform in accordance with Swami Ramakrishnananda's request; and he took the whole party to his house with great courtesy. In the afternoon, a great number of people gathered to pay their respects to the Mother. They prostrated themselves before her after offering her plantains, cocoanuts, and such other fruits. The pilgrims resumed their journey next day and passed by Vishakhapatnam in the afternoon. This health-resort and port town, hanging on the sides of a hillock, attracted the Mother by its beauty; and she said with joy, 'See, see, it

looks just like a picture.' They reached Madras next day at about noon.

At Madras station, Swami Ramakrishnananda and a number of devotees were present to give a fitting reception to the Holy Mother. As the train steamed in, they raised a loud cry of *jaya* (victory) and elation. A two-storeyed house had been rented near the Ramakrishna Math at Mylapore, where the Mother and her companions were taken. Here she lived for about a month during which period she visited the Kapalishwara and the Parthasarathi temples, the beach, the aquarium which was then still incomplete, and the fort. At the last place she drove in a rickshaw for the first time in her life. She used to go out every evening visiting various places of interest.

At her own temporary residence there was a continuous stream of eager souls who wanted to be sanctified—by touching her feet. One day the girls of a local school came to sing religious songs in Tamil and play on their violins and this pleased the Mother very much. Many were initiated by her at this place. Whether it was due to the basic unity of the Indian culture or the Mother's incomprehensible power of transmitting ideas, she could make the new-comers understand the *mantras* and the processes of *japa* and meditation without the help of interpreters, whose assistance she took for other purposes.

In a few days, the Mother's nephew Ramlal arrived at Madras for visiting Rameshwara, and it was decided that the whole party would start for Madurai, famous for its temple of the goddess Minakshi. But just then Ramakrishna Babu's aunt fell ill, and the departure had to be postponed. But it was soon found out that the lady would take a long time to recover. Hence after making adequate provision for her treatment and nursing, the others started on their journey. Through Swami Ramakrishnananda's scrupulous care for providing all possible comfort, the

whole party had second-class accommodation in the train, and he himself accompanied them to see personally to their conveniences. The train reached Madurai in the morning, and they were taken to the house of the Chairman of the local Municipality.

Madurai stands on the river Vaigai. The chief temple there, dedicated to the goddess Minakshi and her consort Sundareshwara (Siva), holds a very high place in Indian architecture. Its tall *gopurams* or gate-towers, rising up in tiers, are very impressive because of their height, grandeur, and sculpture. The mythological anecdotes represented in stone everywhere in the temple precincts keep the devout pilgrims spell-bound for hours together. The image of the goddess appears so lifelike and inspiring that it is difficult to find a second one of its kind. For the disport of the two deities, there are a few permanent stone pavillions (*mandapas*) of which the *sahasra-stambha* (thousand pillared) and *Vasanta* spring) *mandapas* are the best. There is a small pond built in stone called the Shiva-ganga. The Mother and others bathed in it in the afternoon and then visited the deities. Then, in accordance with the local custom, they lighted up lamps on the banks of the pond in each one's name before returning to their residence. During their stay at Madurai, they visited among other places the palace of Tirumal Nayaka and the large tank called Teppakulam (1000' × 950'). The extensive roof of the palace is supported by 125 stone pillars. In the centre of the tank there is a small island. All these sights made the Mother exclaim, 'How wonderful is the play of the Master!'

From Madurai they entrained for Rameshwara and reached Mandapam at noon from where they had to cross over in a steamer to the Pamban (or Rameshwara) island. From Pamban, which is also the name of the port across the strait, they again boarded a train and reached Rameshwara at about eleven in the night. As the temple was closed, they saluted the Deity from outside and went to live

in the quarters arranged for them by the priest-guide Gargam Pitambara. Next morning they bathed in the sea and entered the temple, which in its massiveness and extensiveness seems to be unparalleled. It is built of stone. Round the *sanctum sanctorum* there are three successive encircling corridors. The outermost one is seventeen feet wide and measures 645 feet from east to west and 395 feet from north to south. The middle one is 500 feet and 300 feet respectively. At the entrance of the whole structure is a huge *gopuram*, every inch of which is full of fine sculpture. The story of Siva, the presiding Deity of the temple, is told in stone pillars and walls that line the corridor. On entering the innermost corridor, one finds in front the stone image of *Nandi* (Siva's bull) which is as high as an one-storied building; and near the *Nandi* is a tall pillar. The emblem of Rameshwara is placed in a small basin (*kunda*). As the image is made of soft sandy material, it is kept covered by a golden cap over which the *abhisheka* (bathing) water is poured. But early in the morning, one can have a look at the uncovered image. For the daily *abhisheka* and for other rites of the daily worship of Rameshwara, Ganges water alone is permitted. This is brought from North India with considerable effort, and is sold to pilgrims in small quantities to be poured over the covered emblem of Shiva.

Then the Pamban island, as also the Rameshwara temple, was under the administrative control of the Raja of Ramnad who was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. He had instructed the temple staff by telegram that as the guru of his guru would be visiting the shrine, all facilities should be offered to her. As a consequence, the Holy Mother and her party were taken to the *sanctum sanctorum*, contrary to the general custom, and were allowed to worship the uncovered Siva image to their heart's content with Ganges water, flowers, etc. The Mother offered one hundred and eight golden leaves shaped like the real leaves of the *bel* tree. During all the three days that they stayed

there, they visited the temple every morning and evening. On the third day the Holy Mother arranged for a special worship at the temple, fed the *pandas* after hearing a recital of the glory of Rameshwara from old scriptures; and she presented to each of the *pandas* a water-pot. It is customary to sit with betel and betel-nut in hand at the time of hearing Rameshwara's exploits and offer them to the reader at the end. The Mother faithfully observed all the customs.

The temple staff had been instructed by the Raja to show the temple jewellery to the Mother and present her any piece that she might ask for. When the Raja's wishes were communicated to the Mother she was at a loss to think out what she might really be in need of; and so she said after a pause, 'What can I need? Whatever was necessary has been arranged for by Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda).' And then it struck her that such a refusal might offend them; and hence she corrected herself, 'Well, if Radhu has any need of anything, she will take it.' And to Radhu, she said, 'See, if you can choose anything you may have need of.' The Mother said so out of courtesy; but when the treasury was opened and the gems and diamonds glittered up, her heart began to throb and she kept on praying, 'Master, may not Radhu have any temptation.' The Master heard her. After looking at everything, Radhu said, 'What is there worth taking from all this stuff? I don't want any of these. I have lost my writing pencil; buy one for me.' At this the Mother was immensely relieved and came out to purchase from a roadside shop a pencil worth half an anna.

Brahmachari Krishnalal, who was an attendant of the Mother and who visited Rameswara with her, said to Sarala Devi one day, that on looking at the uncovered Siva image the Mother soliloquized, 'It is just as I had left it.' The devotees that were near at hand inquired, 'What did you say, Mother?' The Mother at once corrected herself and said, 'A meaningless something escaped out of my

lips.' After the party had returned to Calcutta, one day Kedar Babu of Koalpara asked the Mother at the 'Udbodhan', 'How did you find Rameshwara?' And the Mother replied, 'He is just as I had left him, my son.' Then the ever alert Golap-Ma was passing by the verandah. As soon as these words fell on her ears, she stopped and asked with enthusiasm, 'What did you say, Mother?' Taken aback, the Mother said, 'Why, what should I say? I was only saying that I was very much delighted to see it just as I had heard from you.' But Golap-Ma was not to be put off so easily, and she said importunately, 'No, Mother, I have heard everything; it won't do to retract your words now. Isn't it, dear Kedar?' And she whisked away without waiting for a reply to tell everyone of the good tidings. The devotees believe that the same personage who incarnated in the Treta yuga as Sita, the ever faithful consort of Ramachandra, and worshipped a Siva image made of sand on the sea coast of Rameshwara, descended again as the all-enduring and ever gracious Holy Mother, so that the sudden sight of the uncovered image carried her mind unconsciously across the vast span of thousands of years and the past appeared as a vivid present; and forgetful of her immediate environment she made that spontaneous remark.

Dhanuskoti is another sacred place in the island, from where the bridge thrown across the sea by Sri Rama commences. It is customary to worship the sea by presenting a golden or silver bow and arrow. As the Mother could not go there, she sent two of her attendants with the silver bow and arrow to perform the worship on her behalf.

From Rameshwara they returned to Madurai, where they rested for a day, and then they proceeded to Madras. Now, the birthday of the Master approached; and the devotees took advantage of the Mother's presence to make the occasion a great day of joyful celebration. Some people were initiated by her on that day. After the cele-

bration, she left for Bangalore on the 10th of Chaitra (end of March), 1911.

In those days, the surroundings of the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bangalore were quiet and charming. And even at the present time the Ashrama with its extensive grounds continues to preserve that solitude in spite of the rapid growth of the city. The compound is dotted with valuable fruit and flower trees. In front runs the wide Bull Temple Road leading to the temple of that name, which enshrines a huge image of *Nandi* and is visited by streams of pilgrims. The Mother and her women companions were accommodated in the Ashrama building, while the monks and devotees lived in temporary tents outside. As the news of the Mother's visit spread over the town, devotees began to come in great numbers, and the flowers they brought for offering sometimes formed big heaps.

At Bangalore the Mother stayed for about a week. One afternoon she was taken by Swami Vishuddhananda in a carriage to the cave temple of Gavipura, a short distance behind the Ashrama. The Mother got down and visited the temple and then returned to the Ashrama by the same carriage. The whole time spent outside was not long. But, whereas at the time of their going out, there was none there at the Ashrama besides the inmates, when they returned they found the whole compound crowded with a number of visitors. At the sound of the Mother's carriage they stood up instantaneously and then prostrated themselves on the ground. The Mother, who was visibly moved by the sight, alighted from the carriage and stood there motionless for about five minutes, extending her right arm in benediction. Perfect silence reigned all around, and the whole atmosphere was charged with awe. Then the Mother silently walked to the Ashrama and sat in the central room, where the devotees gathered. Here again was enacted that speechless transmission and imbibition of transcendental bliss that the scriptures speak of. There

was no question and no answer, and yet all doubts were resolved. Breaking that tangible silence, the Mother said to Swami Vishuddhananda who was by her side, 'What a pity, I don't know their language! What solace they would derive, if I could but speak a few words!' When Swami Vishuddhananda translated this for the devotees, they said, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full indeed. No words are needed on such an occasion.' Wonderful are the ways of the Mother and wonderful are those of her children!

Here is another incident. There is a small hillock behind the Ashrama building and within its own compound. A short while before dark, the Mother climbed the hillock along with one or two others and sat on its top enjoying the beauty of the setting sun. When Swami Ramakrishnananda heard of this, he said in amazement, 'Indeed! The Mother has become a dweller on the mountain (Parvata-vasini¹,' and hurried towards the place. He was stout, and began to pant as he climbed that low hillock; but undaunted he went up straight to the Mother, prostrated himself there and laying his head on her feet chanted three well-known verses from the *Chandi* beginning with *Sarva-mangala-mangalye* which are used as *mantras* for the salutation of the Divine Mother:

'O auspicious One, Thou art the source of all auspiciousness—Thou art the accomplisher of all cherished desires. Thou art the giver of refuge. Thou possessest the eye of wisdom and beautiful form. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O eternal One, Thou art the energy of creation, preservation and destruction. Thou art the abode of threefold Cosmic energy and Thou art also its manifestor. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.

'O Mother, Thou art the saviour of the distressed and of the careworn, who take refuge in Thee. Thou art the remover of misery of all. O Thou Power Divine, salutations to Thee.'

1. Which is a name of the Divine Mother dwelling on the Himalayas or the Vindhya hills.

And he prayed 'Grace! grace!'. The Mother caressed his head, as though pacifying an importunate son, till Swami Ramakrishnananda felt himself fully blessed.

There was a funny incident at Bangalore. One day the Holy Mother, dressed in her own simple way, sat at one side of the central room and women visitors came to pay their respects to her. With them came a rich woman wearing fine clothes and costly ornaments. She took her seat in the centre of the room. A little later a group of women came, and finding the wealthy lady in the centre mistook her for the Mother. Therefore, they proceeded to salute her. The lady's protests were of no avail; the new-comers pressed on to touch her feet. At this the aristocratic lady jumped up and remonstrated vehemently. By that time, however, she was completely surrounded, and there was a scamper for the first touch of her feet, so that she had to extricate herself somehow and walk out. The Mother sat quietly at her corner all the while; and though she did not grasp one word of what the ladies spoke, she understood with a quiet smile the farce that was going on in front of her.

After spending some days at Bangalore, the Mother and her companions returned to Madras, where they spent a day or two and then started for Calcutta. On the way they rested a day at Rajahmundry where they were guests at the house¹ of Sri M. O. Parthasarathi Iyengar, District and Sessions Judge. The Mother bathed here in the Godavari. Their second halting place was Puri. This time they did not go to the Kshetra-basir Math, but went to Sashi-niketana, the other house of the Boses, where they spent some three or four days. At last they arrived at Calcutta on the 28th of Chaitra (middle of April), 1911.

1. The house is no longer in existence, the plot of land having been acquired by the Municipal Water Works.

The first day that the Mother set her holy feet on the grounds of the Belur Math, after her South Indian pilgrimage, she was given a fitting reception. As a result of the long sojourn, she had returned with better health and a happier mind, which gladdened the devotees also. Moreover, the wonderful news of the enthusiasm created in the South by her inspiring presence and silent ministration had preceded her. And hence all had gathered there to express their devout gratefulness for her unbounded love for her children. The gates of the Math were decorated with plantain trees, under which were placed tastefully painted pitchers, filled with water and with green leaves on the top. On either side of the path stood more than a hundred devotees with folded hands. As the carriage of the Mother came in sight a few crackers were burst, and as the Mother alighted and moved slowly with her women companions, the devotees chanted the *mantras* from the *Chandi*. The order of Swami Brahmananda, abbot of the Math, rang out that nobody should break the line to salute the Mother by touching her feet. So the Mother walked unhampered. Her whole body was covered from head to foot with a white cotton wrapper; and it seemed as though a sacred and animated white image had suddenly descended on the Math ground and was moving silently from south to north. Suddenly somebody seemed to dart out of the line and as quickly salute the Mother and disappear. 'Catch him, catch him. Who's that, who's that?' called out Swami Brahmananda in great amusement. It was none other than Swami Subodhananda, who, because of his being younger than most of the other disciples of Shri Ramakrishna and his simple nature, was called by the others Khoka Maharaj or the baby monk. This exploit of the Swami amused the company very much.

The Mother was taken to the main monastery building. A *kirtana* in honour of Kali was then in progress in the courtyard below, and Swami Brahmananda sat there. Suddenly it was seen that the Swami's body had become

absolutely motionless and his smoke pipe had dropped from his hand. As he did not come round from this state of divine trance, the Mother was informed, and she instructed some one to utter a *mantra* in the Swami's ears. This acted like magic, and the Swami came down to the normal plane with words of appreciation for the music, 'Bravo! Sing on, sing on', as though he had been unmindful just for a passing moment. The Mother was now offered some *prasada* of the Master. She took a little and sent down the rest of it, which the devotees eagerly shared amongst themselves. When in the evening she took leave, a few more crackers were burst to indicate the end of the happy day's function.

ANGLE OF VISION

Radhu was now of marriageable age; and so to perform her wedding ceremony the Mother left for Jayrambati on the 3rd of Jyeshtha (the 18th of May), 1911, and reached Koalpara on the 5th. Koalpara had now come to occupy an important place in the life-history of the Holy Mother. Between the years 1909 and 1919, the Mother rested here for some hours during all her travels between Jayrambati and Calcutta. She used to say, 'This is my parlour.' The inmates of the monastery were wholeheartedly devoted to her and felt blessed if they could do the least service to her. This time, when the news of her coming reached them, they constructed a temporary enclosure for her with palm leaves round the bathing place of the Badujye-pukur. They also tastefully decorated the new shrine-room, enclosed its verandah with screens, cleaned the road and covered it with cloth with flowers spread over. But the Mother had no time to spare. She hurriedly bathed and finished her midday meal, and then after a little rest started for Jayrambati with Radhu in the same palanquin. Before she bade farewell, she said tenderly to the inmates of the monastery, 'Now in these parts you are my mainstay. I see that the Master has in fact made a seat for himself here. And for us all, too, a resting place has come into existence.' When they all bowed down to her one by one, she touched their heads in benediction, and said, 'You all should go to Jayrambati now and then; and, in particular, you have all to go during Radhu's marriage. You will have to attend to all details of the arrangement there.'

In a few days Swami Saradananda, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and one or two Brahmacharis, reached Jayrambati via Koalpara. The marriage was fixed for the 27th of Jyeshtha (middle of June), 1911. The bridegroom was Manmathanath Chatterji who belonged to the landlord

family of Tajpur. The Chatterjis were richer than the Mukherjis of Jayrambati. But Swami Saradananda, who placed the Mother's happiness above everything else, spent money unquestioningly for adorning Radhu in a way befitting a bride entering a landlord's family; and other arrangements for the celebration were on a similar scale. The bridegroom's party took full advantage of their stronger position to extract from the Swami a considerable amount of dowry. But Kedarnath Datta of Koalpara, unable to restrain himself when unreasonable demands were being made, intervened off and on in the talk between the Swami and the bridegroom's party; and the Mother disliking this kind of wrangling and ruffled temper just on the eve of a happy union, called away Kedar Babu. Radhu entered the marriage pandal adorned with gold and silver from head to foot. Uncle Prasanna performed the ceremonial handing over of his niece to Manmatha. She was then past her eleventh year and Manmatha was in his fifteenth.

There was a feast on the next day. When the guests were returning home, the Mother stood at the backdoor and inquired if they had had enough. And they heartily replied, 'May the bride and the bridegroom live happily, Mother.'

At the time of Radhu's going to her father-in-law's house, the Mother gave her a big black box. At night the Master appeared to the Mother to say, 'So you have given away one thousand rupees that was in Radhu's box!' The Mother then remembered that she had that amount of cash in the box, but it had not been removed when the box was being handed over. Next day she sent her devotee Bibbutibhushan Ghosh and a monk and got back the money.

The Mother spared no pains to see that the minutest detail of that auspicious ceremony was duly performed. And yet, in spite of all these domestic engagements, we get from the above incident an inkling of the level of detachment in which her mind soared for ever. But lest the reader should interpret this as a case of ordinary forget-

fulness, we adduce another event which more aptly illustrates our point of view. It was well known that the Mother deeply loved Radhu. And hence it was as desirable for the devotees to see the girl enter a good family as it was for the Mother. Accordingly, one well-wisher once suggested to the Mother that since Master Mahashaya had in his classes many boys of well-to-do families, he could be asked to choose a suitable bridegroom. At this the Mother remarked, 'Let a groom be hit upon, as he may, in the ordinary course of things. I will never ask any one to fall into bondage (of wedlock).' Such was her life of non-attachment, notwithstanding her being outwardly involved in all sorts of household duties, that it was comparable to a lotus leaf untouched by the water on which it floats. Yet none could accuse her of ever neglecting any task.

Radhu's marriage at Tajpur was settled by her relatives before the Mother left for the South. But on seeing the horoscopes of the pair an astrologer expressed the fear that the girl might become a widow. Yet the Mother did not override a decision taken by Radhu's well-wishers. Long after the marriage, when Manmatha sought initiation, she at first declined saying that she would not give any *mantra* to any of her relations. But she yielded at last to his importunities. After making him a disciple, she remarked that though one should not interfere with divine dispensation, Radhu might, after all, escape her widowhood by the force of that initiation.¹

A little over two months after Radhu's marriage, the Ramakrishna Mission lost one of its chief luminaries; Swami Ramakrishnananda passed away at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, on the 21st of August, 1911. When he felt that the end was near, he wanted to see the Mother. But after full deliberation, the Mother decided not to go. The tireless service that the Swami rendered to her in the South was

1. Radhu did not actually lose her husband; but we shall see that her later life was as bad as widowhood, she being forced to live separated from her husband.

still fresh in her mind. How could the Mother bear the sight of the passing away of such a devoted son? And if she came to such a small house as the 'Udbodhan' with all her retinue, it would only add to the discomfort of the patient. Therefore, she sent back the messenger who had gone to Jayrambati for escorting her to Calcutta. Yet Swami Ramakrishnananda saw the Mother near his sick-bed and cried out, 'Mother has come!' Afterwards the poet Girish Babu composed a song about the Mother, taking the cue from the Swami, and the latter was highly delighted to hear it sung. Not long after, he entered the final beatitude. When the news reached Jayrambati, the Mother said sorrowfully, 'My Shashi is gone; my backbone is broken.'

When the devotees of Koalpara arrived at the Mother's house with vegetables on the occasion of the Jagad-dhatri worship that year, the Mother said joyfully, 'Greens and vegetables are not always available here, and hence one is put to great trouble at times. But, methinks, the Master will now provide everything through you'. When the devotees started to return after the worship, the Mother gave them a bundle of fried-rice and other eatables that had been offered to the deity. From that time on, the devotees sent vegetables twice or thrice every week whenever she happened to be at Jayrambati. The economic condition of the Koalpara Ashrama being bad, they could not engage anyone for carrying such loads; and hence after finishing the daily duties, they procured the necessary vegetables from the Ashrama garden or from the market and then carried the load on their own shoulders. At Jayrambati, again, if they found the Mother in need of any daily necessities, such as salt, oil, spices, wheat, etc., which could be had from villages some miles away, they volunteered with alacrity to obtain those things and carry them on their heads to her. When the devotees arrived, the Mother would direct them to leave the things in their proper places. At last they became so familiar with the arrangements there that they could do everything by themselves. When

at last they took leave of her by touching her feet, she blessed them saying, 'May you acquire knowledge; may you get faith and devotion,' and tied to their clothes some fried-rice for a light repast on the way. In fact, the Koalpara Ashrama became, as it were, a part and parcel of her own household for these few years. It had not even then been incorporated with the Ramakrishna Math at Belur.

As it had been settled that the Mother would go to Calcutta after the Jagad-dhatri worship, Brahmachari Prakash had been sent by Swami Saradananda to take her there. The 8th of Agrahayana (about November 23), 1911, was fixed as the date for the journey. A couple of days earlier, Kedar Babu (later Swami Keshavananda), the head of the Koalpara Ashrama, came to Jayrambati to make arrangements for the Mother's stay at that place. The Mother talked as she made betel rolls. When that part of the conversation was over, she said, 'Listen, my boy, as you have built a house for the Master and set up a resting place for us, I shall install the Master there when I pass through the Ashrama this time. Keep everything ready. You will have to carry on worship, offering of cooked food, vesper service, and all such functions regularly. What will you gain by the Swadesi movement¹ alone. The Master is the spring of all that we do or have; he is the ideal. Whatever you do, if you hold on to him, you will never go wrong.' The Ashrama was then a hot-bed of Swadeshi agitation; looms, spinning wheels and political talks being more in evidence than meditation, *japa*, worship, and study. As a result, the police had a sharp eye on the inmates. Nothing daunted, the head of the centre carried on with his bold programme. And hence he could not accept without question all that the Mother said. And yet he could not gather sufficient courage to contradict her openly. Therefore,

1. This political movement, set on foot on October 14, 1905, consisted in the boycotting of foreign, specially British, articles and encouraging home-made ones, even though the latter lacked beauty and fineness. It was a reaction against the autocracy of Lord Curzon, which manifested itself in its worst form in the partition of Bengal.

he argued indirectly: 'But, of a truth, Swamiji (Vivekananda) wanted us very much to work for the country, and he laid the foundation of selfless work by inspiring the youth of the country. What a lot of work would be done if he were alive now!' Carried away by the trend of his own thought, Kedar Babu unknowingly touched more than one chord in the Mother's heart. The symphony that he aroused thereby was equally sweet and full, and yet replete with deep spiritual meaning. Hardly had he finished when the Mother intervened, 'O my dear! If Naren (Vivekananda) were there today, would the Company¹ let him alone? They would lock him up in a jail. I couldn't have borne the sight. Naren was like an unsheathed sword. After his return from foreign countries, he said, "By your grace, Mother, I did not have to cross the ocean by jumping in this age², but went to those parts in their own ships; and there, too, I noticed, how great is the glory of the Master; what a number of good people have heard about him and accepted this idea from me with astonished eagerness!" They, too, are my children—don't you agree?' Kedar found no answer and kept silent. His first mistake was to support his own course of action by suggesting a false analogy with Swami Vivekananda, and his second error consisted in tending to convert his patriotism into a kind of dislike for foreigners. By the Mother's words he stood corrected, and it also dawned on him that selfless work cannot be properly carried on unless religion is accepted as its basis.

While on this topic, we shall be excused if we digress a little to give a fuller idea of the Mother's angle of vision. After the completion of her new house at Jayrambati in 1917, the Mother was living in it at the time of the

1. Though the East India Company was succeeded by the British Government after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the old people continued for long to refer to the Government as the Company.

2. In search of Sita who was abducted by Ravana, King of Sri Lanka Sri Rama's messenger Hanuman crossed the strait between India and Sri Lanka jumping over it.

Durga worship. On that occasion she sent a Brahmachari to purchase some clothes to be presented to her nephews and nieces. He belonged to the Koalpara Ashrama and had imbibed a liking for country-made things. And so he purchased clothes made by the Indian mills, which were coarse and had no attractive borders. Naturally, the girls did not like them; they wanted finer clothes in exchange. The Brahmachari protested in disgust: 'Well, those are foreign clothes. To think that one can purchase them!' The Mother was there sitting in a corner. She heard everything and said with a smile, 'My boy, they (the foreigners), too, are my children. I have to carry on with all; can I afford to be one-sided? Bring for them the clothes just as they want.' And yet it was against her nature to do violence to anybody's feelings; and hence she never again sent this Brahmachari for purchasing foreign clothes; if the need arose, she asked somebody else to do so.

But liberal outlook and connivance at violence are as poles asunder. At the news of police ill-treatment towards Sindhubala and others, the Mother, though noted for her natural suavity, could hardly restrain her indignation. The wife and a sister of Deven Babu of the village Juthabihara in Bankura, had the same name Sindhubala. The sister was then in the family way. Under suspicion of complicity in subversive activity, the police wanted to arrest one of the Sindhubalas; but owing to identity of names they first took into custody the sister who was in her husband's village Sabajpur. And then they arrested the wife also. The news of these two arrests travelled from mouth to mouth till uncle Kali came in a very agitated mood and reported to the Mother that the police had treated the women inhumanly and made them walk the whole way; and that even when the villagers had protested and suggested that some transport should be arranged, the police had turned a deaf ear. At this cruel news the Mother cried in surprise, 'What do you say?' and her whole frame shook. Then

red with indignation she said, 'Is this an order of Company (Government) or an overzealous act on the part of the police? We never heard of such inhuman treatment towards innocent women in the reign of Queen Victoria. If this is an order from the Company, then it will be doomed soon. Was there no man there who could give them some slaps and snatch away the girls?' A little while after, when uncle Kali communicated to her the news of their release, she was somewhat pacified and said, 'If I had not heard this news, I would have no sleep tonight.'¹

On another occasion the Mother was at Koalpara. The first World War (1914-18) was raging. The devotee Prabodhchandra Chatterji came and made his obeisance to the Mother, who inquired about his health and general welfare, and then asked, 'Well, my dear, what's the news of the war? What a tremendous sacrifice of lives has there been—what a machine for killing have they invented! What a lot of instruments there are nowadays—telegraph etc. See, for instance, how Rashbehari (Swami Arupananda) started from Calcutta yesterday and arrived here today. How we toiled and trudged on to reach Dakshineswar (in those days).' Encouraged by this, Prabodh Babu enthusiastically eulogized the achievements of science and said, 'The British Government has increased the general welfare in our country.' The Mother heard the whole speech and then remarked, 'But, my son, there is now in our country a greater want of food and clothing. Formerly there was no such paucity of food.'

Let us now pass on to another occasion. There was a great scarcity of cloth all round. The women could not come out of their houses for want of clothes to cover their

1. We do not narrate the Sindhubala incident as a historian does, but just as it was communicated to the Mother. Basically it was true and took place in 1917-18. Newspapers, then, were not so much in vogue in the villages, and as news travelled by word of mouth, there were chances of distortion so far as details were concerned. We are here primarily concerned not with authentic history but with the Mother's reactions to the reports presented to her.

bodies with; and news of suicides for this reason was being frequently published in the daily papers. One day, as somebody mentioned to the Mother about some of these sad events, she was so much moved that at first tears trickled down her cheeks; and at last no longer able to check her emotion, she cried out in agony, 'When, indeed, will they (the English) go? When will they?' When she cooled down a little, she said with regret, 'In those days there were spinning wheels in every house, cotton was cultivated in the fields, all spun and wove their own clothes, there was no dearth of cloth. But the Company came and destroyed it all. The Company promised ease—one could have four pieces of cloth for a rupee and one more in the bargain. All became *babus* (ease-loving); the spinning wheel went out of vogue. And now have all the *babus* become *kabu* (in a tight corner).' We have to remember that the non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi with its concomitant, the revival of the spinning wheel, was yet to come.

The Mother's heart was moved by the country's miseries; at times her eyes were blood-red at the iniquities of the foreign exploiters, or shed profuse tears at their heartless oppression. But as an ultimate remedy to all the sorrows she clung to the Master and asked others also to do so. In fact, all her thoughts and deeds centred on Sri Ramakrishna. Those were the days of the Swadesi movement; so, when one patriot asked her, 'Mother, will not the trials and tribulations of this country ever end?' the Mother replied that the Master had come for that very purpose. Accordingly, though she was attracted by the practical enthusiasm of the devotees of Koalpara, she decided that the Master should be installed in the Ashrama as its presiding deity, for otherwise the workers would soon be swept off their moorings. That was why she wanted to initiate the Master's worship there on her way to Calcutta.

That was the middle of November when it is cold in the morning. But as the Mother had to perform the

Master's worship at Koalpara, she started early by a palanquin; and Lakshmi Devi, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's husband Manmatha followed her in separate palanquins, while the mad aunt, Nalini Devi, Bhudev and others travelled by bullock-carts. And there was Brahmachari Prakash as the manager of the party.

The Koalpara devotees made adequate arrangements for the Master's worship. The Mother bathed after arriving there, and then placing on the altar the Master's photograph, and by its side her own, she worshipped them duly. Brahmachari Kishori (afterwards Swami Parameshwarananda) performed the *homa* at her bidding. When the installation of the Master was over, all took *prasada*. After this and before the midday meal the Mother walked with her nieces Lakshmi and Nalini to Kedar's house at a little distance. When Brahmachari Prakash came to know of this, he became annoyed and said to the local devotees, 'You know nothing of the Mother's position and prestige. Why did you make her walk without my knowledge? Anyway, you should bring her back in a palanquin.' But not waiting for his order to be executed, he went with a palanquin and two Ashrama inmates to bring her. They met the Mother on the way and Brahmachari Prakash requested her to get into the palanquin, which she did without a murmur. But on arriving at the Ashrama she reproached him saying, 'This is our rural resort. Koalpara is my parlour. These are all my own boys. I want to be a little free in my movements so long as I am here. When I come from Calcutta, I heave a sigh of relief. There you keep me shut up in a cage—I am always under restraint. If here, too, I have to toe the line, well, I shan't be able to do so—you may inform Sarat (Saradananda) accordingly.' Then the Brahmachari begged her pardon explaining that in his enthusiasm to see that there was no lack of attention on his part, he had been guilty of unwittingly curtailing her liberty.

It was planned that the journey should be resumed after six o'clock in the evening, and the food to be taken on the way should be made ready by then. But in spite of their best efforts, the Ashrama people could not finish their work in time. As this irritated the Brahmachari, they suggested that the Calcutta party might start according to schedule, and that they would somehow overtake them with the food on the way. The Mother, who heard it all, reprehended the Brahmachari thus: 'What makes you lose your balance and take them to task like that? This is village atmosphere; can everything be got ready by the clock as in Calcutta. Don't you notice how diligently the boys have been working from the morning? Whatever you may say, there will be no moving out of here before finishing our meals.' Accordingly, all had to wait and start for Vishnupur after food at eight o'clock in eight bullock-carts.

AT BELUR AND BANARAS

The Mother was expected to come to the Belur Math on October 16, 1912, on the evening of the *Bodhana*¹. Evening was advancing, and yet there was no sign of the Mother's coming; and so Swami Premananda was moving about in a flurry. At the gate he saw that the plantain trees and sacred pitchers had not been arranged as yet, and he said, 'These things have not been done as yet; how can the Mother come?' No sooner was the ceremonial awakening of the Deity finished than was seen the Mother's carriage at the gate. The monks and devotees led by Swami Premananda ran up at once, unharnessed the horses, and drew the carriage into the courtyard. As the Swami was thus engaged, one could see him trembling with emotion, joy scintillating from his eyes, face, and every limb. When the carriage stopped Golap-Ma carefully helped the Mother out of it. The Mother then looked around with beaming eyes and said, 'Everything is ready tip-top. It is as though we ourselves have come attired like the goddess Durga.' From that day the Mother stayed on till the eleventh day of the moon. She stayed in the southern portion of the garden house, north of the monastery. Along with her, there lived in that house Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Lakshmi Devi, and Bhanu-pisi.

On the second day of the worship, more than three hundred devotees bowed down before the Mother, one by one. She was sitting on her cot facing west. As each devotee touched her feet, she blessed him. Four persons

1. According to Hindu belief, the gods and goddesses sleep for six months from summer solstice to winter solstice, waking up for six months on the latter day. As the Durga worship is celebrated in the first period, She has to be ceremonially awakened. This is done on the sixth day of the bright half of the lunar month. The actual worship takes place on the three succeeding days, and the image is immersed on the tenth day of the moon or the fourth day of the worship.

had their initiation on that day. The drama *Jana* was enacted that night, and on the night of the immersion ceremony was enacted the *Ramashwamedha*. The Mother witnessed both these performances from the upper storey of the monastery. After the third day's worship, Golap-Ma informed Swami Saradananda, 'Sarat, the Mother is highly pleased with your service and sends you her benediction.' The Swami, hardly knowing how to acknowledge that blessing, was deeply moved and exclaimed 'Indeed!'. And then looking meaningfully at Swami Premananda he added, 'Brother Baburam, did you hear?' The latter had heard it well enough; now in reply to Swami Saradananda's question he clasped him in a warm embrace.

On the tenth day of the moon, when the image was taken away on a boat for immersion in the Ganges, Dr. Kanjilal danced, gesticulated, and made faces at the image like a child, thereby evoking roars of laughter. But one of the Brahmacharis protested against these gestures and postures. The Mother was watching the whole scene from her own residence. When a monk drew her attention to the reaction of the puritanic Brahmachari, she said, 'No, no! All this is right. The goddess has to be entertained in every way through music, fun, and frolic.' The Mother returned to the 'Udbodhan' on October 22.

This was not either the first or the last visit of the Mother to the Belur Math during the Durga worship. She was there in Swami Vivekananda's time and also in 1916. With Belur she had a long association, and she had a love for the place. Many a time she had come there and stayed at the garden house of Nilambar Babu or at the rented house at Ghusuri; and all those places were sanctified by meditation and *japa*, religious discussion and practice, spiritual experiences and visions. In a reminiscent mood she said one day, 'Ah! How well I was at Belur! What a peaceful place it is! Meditation came naturally. And that is why Naren (Vivekananda) wanted to have a piece of land there.' It was not really Swami Vivekananda alone

who wished for a permanent residence there, the Mother's will also exerted its influence in bringing about that happy consummation. The monks were aware of this as also of the reality which had taken human form in the Mother, and hence they could not consider the worship of Durga a success unless She in Her human form came to the monastery to accept their adoration personally. At the commencement of the worship her name was ceremonially announced by the priest as the beneficiary of the celebration, and even to this day, that custom is being followed. The memories of the incidents connected with the Mother's presence at the Belur Math during those festivals are very inspiring to the monks and are treasured by them in their hearts. When the Mother came to the place of worship, the monks offered at her feet handfuls of flowers as they did at those of the Deity; and they did not consider their worship complete without such an offering. And during the celebration they kept their eyes fixed on her face; if she smiled, they thought that the goddess had accepted their worship. During one of these celebrations, Swami Brahmananda, the head of the monastery, worshipped her feet with one hundred and eight full-blown lotuses on the second day of the worship.

During the festival of 1916, the Mother came to Belur on the first day (*saptami*) of the worship, and lived in the garden house north of the monastery. Shortly after she had returned to her apartment after witnessing the worship, elders of the Math heard that as Radhu had fallen ill, the Mother would have to go back to Calcutta. Brahmachari Krishnalal who brought the message suggested to Swami Premananda to beg her to stay on. But the Swami replied, 'My boy, who dare dissuade the Great Mother! It shall be as She wills; we cannot do aught against Her wishes?' As a matter of fact, she did not go, for Radhu's condition improved, and the Mother gave up the thought of going. On the morning of the second day (*Ashtami*), she came to the courtyard of the monastery.

Nearby the inmates were dressing vegetables for the kitchen. At this the Mother remarked, 'The boys, I see, can dress vegetables well enough.' And Swami Jagadananda, who was also engaged in the work, said with a smile, 'Our object is to please the Great Mother, be that through spiritual practice or through dressing of vegetables.'

Some record of the worship that year has been preserved in a letter of Swami Shivananda, a portion of which we translate: 'Owing to the presence of the blessed Holy Mother, it has altogether been a direct worship (and not merely worship of the goddess in an image). Although there was continuous rain and storm on all the three days, yet by the Mother's grace, no part of the celebration suffered. And it even happened that just as the devotees sat for taking *prasada* the rain stopped. All were surprised at this. Afterwards it was learnt from Yogin-Ma that whenever the devotees sat for *prasada* and rain seemed to be imminent, the Mother sat down to make *japa* of Durga's name, and she prayed, "Dear me! How can so many people sit down to eat in this rain? Their leaf-plates and everything will certainly be washed away. Mother, save us!" And Mother Durga did indeed save. It happened likewise during all the three days.' After the Sandhi-puja (worship that is performed at the sacred moment of the junction of the eighth and ninth days of the moon) was over, Swami Saradananda said to a Brahmachari, 'Go and offer this guinea piece to the Mother and salute her.' The Brahmachari was not quite sure who was meant. He thought that the offering was to be made to the goddess. All the same he queried the Swami, who replied, 'Mother is there in that garden. Go and offer the guinea piece at her feet and salute her. It is she who has been worshipped here.'

For the convenience of the narrative we have skipped over the intermediate years to describe the two celebrations together. Let us now return to 1912. The Mother left

Calcutta a few weeks after the worship of Durga that year and arrived at Banaras on the 5th of November. After reaching the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama at Banaras at noon, she took a little rest and then went to Lakshminivasa, the newly built house of the Dattas of Baghbazar, Calcutta; and here she stayed for two and a half months. In expectation of the Mother's coming the owners had ceremonially opened the house only a few days earlier. The Mother stayed in the first floor with Golap-Ma, Bhanu-pisi, Kedarnath Datta's mother, and Master Mahashaya's wife and his sister-in-law; while Swami Prajnanda and other male devotees lived in the ground floor. The wide verandah of the house pleased the Mother and she remarked, 'We are indeed rather fortunate. A narrow place narrows down the mind, while a commodious place expands it.'

The very next day the Mother went to visit the Deities Vishwanatha and Annapurna in a palanquin. On the day following the worship of Kali (i.e., November 9), she visited the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, otherwise known as the Sevashrama, where Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda and Turiyananda, Charu Babu (Swami Shobhananda), Dr. Kanjilal, and others were present. Kedar-baba (Swami Achalananda) accompanied her palanquin and showed her round. When she had seen every department, she sat down and in the course of a conversation with Kedar-baba expressed great delight at all the houses, gardens, etc., she had seen, and the good management she had noticed. She further added, 'The Master himself is present here and Mother Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) is here in all her majesty.' Then she wanted to know how the institution took shape and with whom the idea first originated. After hearing and seeing all about the institution she remarked, 'The place is so fine that I feel like staying on in Banaras.' Soon after she had reached her residence, somebody came with a ten-rupee note and handing it over to the head said, 'Kindly accept these ten

rupees as the Mother's donation to the Sevashrama.' That note is still treasured there as an invaluable asset.

That day a devotee asked the Mother at her residence, 'Mother, how did you find the Sevashrama?' She said calmly, 'I saw the Master himself present there, and that is why this work goes on here. These are all his work.' When this view of the Mother was communicated to Swami Brahmananda, he in his turn told it to Swami Shivananda. Just then Master Mahashaya was seen coming that way. His belief was that it was contrary to the Master's teachings to engage in that kind of social service without first realizing God through spiritual disciplines like *japa*, meditation, and austerity. Swami Brahmananda who knew his views, now set some devotees and Brahmacharis to ask him, 'Mother has said that the Sevashrama is the Master's work, and that the Master himself is present there. Now what do you say to that?' At Master Mahashaya's approach they crowded round him and put the question all in one voice, and the Swami too joined in. At this, Master Mahashaya smiled broadly and said, 'It can no longer be denied.'

Swami Brahmananda, in the course of his morning strolls visited the Lakshmi-nivasa and inquired about the Mother's health from Golap-Ma and sometimes made fun. One morning, as he came there, Master Mahashaya came out of his room and from the upper verandah Golap-Ma said, 'Rakhal, Mother asks you, why Sakti (Divine Energy conceived of as a woman) is worshipped first (before the male aspect)?'. Swami Brahmananda replied, 'It is because Mother has in her keeping the key to knowledge of Brahman. There is no other way unless Mother, out of compassion, unlocks the door with the key.' And he sang a song in the *baul* tune:

O mind, remain immersed in meditating the feet of Siva's wife;
Be immersed and avoid all misery.
All these three worlds are vain and in vain, you roam about.

Meditate within you the Coiled Energy that's of none but Brahman.
This is Kamalakanta's (poet's) message, 'Sing the glory of Mother
Kali.

This indeed, is a stream of bliss; and paddle on slowly.'

As the song proceeded, he fell in the grip of a divine ecstasy and danced merrily; and at the end cried out, 'Ho, ho, ho!' and dashed out of the place. The Mother enjoyed this dance and afflatus from above, and below were Master Mahashaya and a few other devotees who also felt stirred to the depths by it all.

On the 28th of Agrahayana (December 14), she went out to visit the shrine of some of the gods and goddesses of Banaras. On another day when she came to the Tilabhandeshwara temples from the Vaidyanatha temple, she said of the Siva image at the former place that it was a natural one. Afterwards she went to the Kedarnath temple a little before dusk and attended the evening service after having a look at the holy Ganges. About Kedarnath she said, 'This Kedar and that (on the Himalayas) are the same — they are connected. If you see this one, you as well see the other. He is very much alive.'

She also visited the Sarnath ruins a few miles away. Miss MacLeod, who happened to be at a hotel in the cantonment area then, sent the hotel phaeton for her. But as it did not come in time, the Mother along with Radhu and Bhudev started away by a hackney carriage. When the phaeton came, Swami Brahmananda and some others proceeded by it to the same place. As the Mother was engaged in seeing the Buddhist ruins at Sarnath, she noticed some foreigners observing those things with evident astonishment, and she said, 'The people who constructed these things have come again; and struck with astonishment are remarking, "What wonderful things they made!"' At the time of returning, Swami Brahmananda had it communicated to the Mother that he wanted her to drive in the phaeton, while he himself would ride in the carriage.

But the Mother protested saying, 'No, no. Rakhal (Brahmananda) and others came in that one, and they will ride back in it. I shall be all right in this one.' But she complied at last and drove ahead in the phaeton, while Swami Brahmananda and his companions followed in the carriage. When the Mother was out of sight, the hackney carriage turned turtle while negotiating a bend. The Swami was not hurt much; recovering from the fall he said merrily, 'Luckily the Mother did not travel by this carriage.' The Mother on hearing of the incident said, 'That accident was really in store for me, but Rakhal perforce diverted it to his own shoulders. Otherwise, what, with those young ones in my carriage, might not have happened!'

The Mother visited two holy men this time at Banaras—one of them was a follower of Sri Nanak, and the other was Chameli Puri. The former was new to the place and was seated on the bank of the Ganges. The Mother offered a rupee at his feet and saluted him. The grand old monk Chameli Puri was asked by her companion Golap-Ma, 'Who arranges for your food?' And the Puri replied with faith and warmth, 'It is Mother Durga alone who does; who else does?' The monk's faith and deportment pleased the Mother immensely and on returning home she said, 'Ah! The old man's face comes to my mind—it is so very like that of a child!' Next day she sent him some oranges, sweets, and a blanket. When on a subsequent day there was a talk of her going out to see more holy men, she remarked, 'What more holy men have I to see! For there indeed I have seen a holy man! Who else can there be?'

She had visited Banaras twice before, but she could not remain long. She took advantage of this long stay to hear the *Kashi-Khanda*¹ and visited more temples. She was present one day at the Ramakrishna Advita Ashrama during the enactment of the *Rasa-lila*². As was the custom, she saluted the two boys who played the roles of Krishna

1. A mythological account of the glories of Banaras.

2. Boy Krishna's dance with the cowherd lasses of Vrindavan.

and Radha, by offering money at their feet. And she was followed in this by others. On another day, she sat there for two hours to hear the exposition of a portion of the *Bhagavata*. In addition Swami Girijananda went to her residence every afternoon to read to her the same book. On the 30th of December fell the birthday of the Mother, which was duly celebrated in her presence at the Advita Ashrama.

In the life of the Mother the two currents of spirituality and household affairs were so intermingled that for any new-comer it was difficult to separate the two or to comprehend their separate import. One day some local women visitors found the Holy Mother busy with Radhu and Bhudev, and in addition asking Golap-Ma to mend her cloth. Finding there only a repetition of their usual household scene, one of them could not help blurting out, 'Mother, I see, yōu are deeply engrossed in Maya.' 'What to do, my good girl,' answered the Mother, 'I am myself Maya.'¹ To be sure, the hint fell flat on the critic.

Another day, there came three or four women. The Mother was then seated on one side of the verandah, while Golap-Ma and others sat on the other side. As Golap-Ma appeared to be older and possessed of a more imposing personality, one of them saluted her and tried to enter into a conversation. Golap-Ma saw through the mistake and said, 'There sits the Holy Mother.' Not impressed by the simple appearance of the Mother, the woman thought that Golap-Ma was jesting with her; but when Golap-Ma repeated what she had said, the woman had to go to the Mother, who, however, was tempted to enjoy the fun and said with a smile, 'No, no, she indeed is the Holy Mother.' The woman was now in a fix — for both talked the same way, and there was no means of ascertaining the truth. So after some hesitation she decided to follow her first impulse and advanced towards Golap-Ma,

1. Maya may mean delusion, as also the Universal Mother who is its source. The latter is often called Mahamaya, the Great Maya.

who, however, rebuked her saying, 'Have you no judgment at all? Don't you notice whether it is a human or divine face? Does any human being appear like that?' The Mother had in reality something unique in her simple and yet placid look which revealed its supernormal character to any pure and discriminating mind. But how could that divine light be reflected on the dark and distracted minds which run after sordid worldly vanities?

The Mother left Banaras on the 2nd of Magha (January 16), 1913, and reached Calcutta the next day, where she remained for more than a month and then started for Jayrambati on the 11th of Phalguna (February 26), 1913.

IN A RURAL SETTING

After the opening of a railway station at Vishnupur, the Mother always travelled home via Vishnupur. At first she knew no one there and so she halted on the banks of either the Poka-bandh or the Lal-bandh, two of the big tanks there; and the cooking was done in some small wayside hut. Subsequently, when Swami Saradananda stayed there for two months in the second quarter of 1909, Sri Sureshwar Sen and his family became earnest followers of Sri Ramakrishna through contact with the Swami. From 1911 onward, the Mother usually rested for a while in their house, and sometimes stopped there for more than a day. The Master had once told her, 'My dear, Vishnupur is hidden Vrindaban; you must see it.' The Mother could not imagine at the time that Vishnupur would in due course become an important point on her way, and so she remonstrated, 'I am a woman; how can I see?' But the Master just said, 'No, my dear, you will see, you will.' Once, while passing through the town, the Mother visited the temple of the goddess Sarvamangala on the bank of the Lal-bandh, and she said, 'Verily! The Master's word has come true today.' Although Vishnupur has now lost its former importance, it still holds in its bosom the bright memories of its princes and unfolds before sympathetic visitor a bright chapter of Bengal's history in its old temples, and buildings, some of them in ruins now. The large tanks — Poka-bandh, Lal-bandh, and Krishna-bandh — strike one with wonder even in their present neglected state. The Mother used to enjoy her visits to Vishnupur.

In the middle of February 1913, the inmates of the Ashrama at Koalpara were informed that the Mother would shortly be visiting them. So, on the appointed day, the young inmates prepared to receive the Mother from a little beyond the borders of their place. As soon as the bullock-carts came into sight, one of the boys ran back to

the Ashrama to give those behind the happy news. Another boy walked with the Mother's cart and a little later he jumped up to the seat of the cartman and like an expert driver made the team of bullocks move very fast. The Mother was much amused at this and said smilingly, 'I see, you can drive the cart well enough, indeed. Well, it's good to learn all kinds of work.' The cart stopped at the Ashrama door, and the Mother was helped down by Kedar's mother; for, the prolonged sitting in the cart had made her rheumatic legs a little stiff. The devotees now saluted her one by one. Then she bathed in the Badujye-pukur and told the above-mentioned boy, 'You change your cloth for a bath towel and then pluck flowers and make arrangements for the worship.' The boy picked up the Mother's wet towel and went about his task. But Kedar's mother shouted to him, 'Hellow, my boy, why have you worn the Mother's towel? Change it, change it!' But the Mother said, 'What of that? What does it matter if a boy wears my towel. He is a boy: and boys are guileless.' And to the boy she said, 'Go and bring the flowers!'

When the flowers were brought, Kedar's mother selected the best of them for worship and the boy engaged himself in making sandal-paste for the worship, Brahmachari Kishori entered the kitchen, and Kedar carried on a conversation with the Mother. He said, 'Mother, all your sons are learned excepting a very few like us.' The Mother said tenderly, 'Fancy! The Master was not at all a learned man. The real thing is to have love for God. Methinks, many things will be accomplished on this side by you. What a lot these boys are doing for me. Why do you worry? The Master incarnated himself this time to save the rich, the poor, the learned, the ignorant, and all. I love you, you are my own boys.' After lunch she rested a little and then left that very day for Jayrambati in a palanquin.

As the rainy season of 1913 set in, malaria and dysentery spread widely in Jayrambati. In those days the

villagers got their mail twice a week from the post office at Anur, across the river Amodar, which at that time was in high flood, thus cutting off communication for a long time. The consequent absence of any news from the Mother caused deep anxiety in Swami Saradananda's mind, and he sent a messenger to her. He reported that the Mother was suffering from dysentery. A wire to that effect was sent from Kotulpur. As a result Dr. Kanjilal arrived with Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School, and in a couple of days followed Yogin-Ma's sister Kali-dasi and Master Mahashaya's wife. Through their care and treatment the Mother came round in a few days. But, then, it became a problem for her to arrange for the comfort of so many guests from the city to whom a village during rains is most uninviting. The roads are then muddy, and vegetables and other fresh food-stuff difficult to procure. The Mother, therefore, told the Koalpara devotees very frankly that they alone could help her in this difficulty. The devotees responded cheerfully, and they not only supplied her with the necessary things, but also lent a hand in household duties. When the Mother was fully recovered, Dr. Kanjilal and Kali-dasi went back to Calcutta.

But owing to incessant work amid rain and sun, the Koalpara devotees fell ill with malaria. For about ten days the Mother did not hear from Koalpara and she feared that perhaps all the inmates had fallen ill. She knew too well the strict economy practised by the head of the Ashrama, and it made her all the more anxious. Therefore, she made inquiries through a woman and found that her apprehension was correct, the Ashrama inmates were all ill. Hence she sent a letter to Koalpara through the same woman again, which ran thus: 'Dear Kedar, I myself installed the Master there in the Ashrama. He liked parboiled rice, and ate nutritious food too. So I tell you, you will offer to the Master parboiled rice; and you shall not offer less than three curries, howsoever you may have to manage that. You cannot otherwise fight successfully with malaria.'

On the 13th of Ashwina (September 28), 1913, the Mother went to Calcutta, and the next year she wrote back to Kedar, 'If you can have a house erected for me at Koalpara, I can stay there now and then when I go to the village. The difficulties in my brothers' families are ever on the increase; and I can't always endure them. There is no place for me to which I can move in case of illness or in some similar contingency.' Stimulated by this proposal, the Ashrama inmates built for her a small house in the compound of Kedar's old paternal home. The Mother had now at her disposal a self-contained household with three contiguous bedrooms, a separate kitchen shed, and other necessary conveniences. This was later on called the Jagadamba-Ashrama or the Ashrama of the Divine Mother.

On the 6th of Vaishakha (April 20), 1915, the Mother started for Jayrambati from Calcutta. She was overjoyed to see the new house, but said, 'I shan't be able to stay this time; there are too many (Radhu and Maku and their husbands, etc.,) with me. I shall take them all to Jayrambati, leave them there, and then come with Radhu to pass here a few days.' Then she left for Jayrambati.

Three months later, a date was fixed for her going to Koalpara. It was in the middle of the wet season. On the appointed day, it began pouring from early morning. The first reaction of the Ashramites was that it would not be proper to bring the Mother there in such weather; but ultimately they decided that at least for the sake of keeping their word they should follow the plan, leaving the choice of coming or not coming to the Mother herself. As soon as they fought their way to Jayrambati with a palanquin, uncle Kali brawled out, 'The monkeys that you are! You pose as sister's devotees! Kedar has, forsooth, a pig's brain! How wonderfully did Yogen Maharaj (Swami Yogananda) serve my sister; with what care Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) does everything! How wonderful is their devotion! And how could you think of coming to take her in this rain?' The Mother heard every word and

smiled as she looked at the devotees. Encouraged by the Mother's kindly looks, one of the Koalpara devotees said, 'Do we, in fact, possess the competence to take the Mother or serve her? It was settled beforehand that we should come with the palanquin today, and that is why we are here.' 'You can keep your word,' joined in the Mother with a broad smile, 'and can't I mine? You take me now; Radhu and others will go later on when they may.' The Koalpara devotees then admitted defeat and said, 'How can that be? When none can come out of the house in this shower, should we get you drenched by taking you out and thus make you ill?' That put uncle Kail also in good humour. And in the darkness of the night the palanquin went back the way it had come.

Next month the Mother went to Koalpara with her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu, and Radhu's mother. But she could not stay there in the new house for more than fifteen days, as she had left Jayrambati in the month of Bhadra (August-September) which is inauspicious for a long sojourn.

The time for the Jagad-dhatri worship (November) now drew near. The man who was to be in charge of the store for the celebrations fell ill; and hence the Mother asked a Koalpara boy to take up the work. But as he was not a brahmin, she cautioned him thus: 'It will be all right if you are only a little careful so as not to touch prohibited articles.' Social restrictions were very stringent then; even today they are harder than in towns. Sister Nivedita once said to Shyamasundari Devi, 'Granny, shall I go to your village, enter your kitchen, and cook there?' But Grandmother replied, 'Don't my good grand-daughter; they will excommunicate us if you enter our kitchen.' Once when the *prasada* of Jagad-dhatri was being distributed among the brahmins by uncle Kali, a monk unwittingly approached him and put a ceremonial mark on his forehead after the performance of the *homa* (sacrifice). This enraged the brahmin landlords who left the place at once for fear of

losing caste. They turned a deaf ear to the Mother's entreaty; on the contrary, they extracted a fine of twenty-five rupees. Subsequently, Sri Lalitmohan Chatterji came to the village with a gramophone to entertain the villagers. This was a new thing in rural parts and attracted a good gathering including the people who had earlier extracted the fine. Lalitmohan thought that to be a good opportunity for taking vengeance on those who had been so disrespectful to the Mother; and he threatened to shoot them unless the fine was paid back. Needless to say, the money was immediately repaid. For this and similar other exploits, Lalitmohan earned for himself the title of Kaiser among the devotees.

That was an ingenious little plan contrived personally by Lalitmohan. As for the Mother, she accepted all such restrictions in the field of social dealings; but amidst the devotees she tried to forget as much of them as possible. It was the family custom to worship Jagad-dhatri for three days instead of one; and on all days she went to the place of worship with her sisters-in-law to offer flowers at the feet of the goddess. On the night of the last day (Ekadasi), the monks sang in chorus the glory of the goddess. One of the songs pleased them very much and they repeated it more than once. It ran in part thus:

None need worry any more as to how one will see the Mother;
For, surely, She is not the mother of you or me, but of all in the
Universe.

The Mother heard it all. Then she said to the boy devotee of Koalpara, 'Ah! The song created a deep fervour. Of a truth, how can the devotees really have caste? Children are all equal. I wish I could have them all seated round the same plate for food. But there is this little difficulty; this benighted land brags of caste. Anyway, no prohibition attaches to fried-rice. You will do one thing tomorrow — you will go to Kamarpukur, and bring four

pounds of *jilapi*¹ from the shop of Satya, the sweetmeat seller.' The *jilapi* came next morning at about nine. The Mother offered the sweets to the Master; and then putting some fried-rice on a big plate, arranged the *jilapis* round the heap of fried-rice. This was sent to the devotees who sat round the plate and merrily partook of the food, while the Mother tenderly watched from an adjoining room.

By and by the villagers came to recognize the devotees as a class by themselves. One day, she sat on the porch in front of the main door of the house. Some boys were playing in the open space in front. When some unknown devotees passed by the boys, one of them asked his companion, 'Who are they?' The other boy answered with a pose of wisdom, 'Why, they are devotees, don't you know?' And when the first boy wanted to know their caste, the wise boy repeated, 'Why, don't you know? — they are disciples.' The Mother overheard them and said, 'Mark you! What comes out of children's mouths is often enough quite true. They have taken it for granted that the devotees form a caste!'

One incident at the beginning of 1916 is not only very funny, but is also illustrative of the Mother's fortitude in circumstances of danger. At that time, Gauri-Ma once went by way Koalpara to see the Mother at Jayrambati. From Koalpara she picked up Brahmachari Varada as a companion. As she rested by the Amodar an idea flashed into her mind. When she approached the Mother's door at nightfall, she tied a turban round her head like a man and advancing a little inside the compound of the house cried out like a beggar, 'Mother, may it please you to give me alms, mother!' The mad aunt came out of the verandh and demanded, 'Who is that?' Gauri-Ma again begged in a pitiable tone, 'May it please you to give me

1. Flour is mixed with water to make a thin paste, which is pushed through a small round hole in boiling oil or butter to form into crisp, spiral coils, which are then soaked in syrup.

alms, mother!' Finding a man standing there at such an unusual hour¹, the mad aunt shrieked out, 'O dear sister-in-law', and she rushed to the Mother who walked out steadily and asked 'Who is that?'. Gauri-Ma kept standing where she was and repeated, 'May it please you to give me some alms, mother! I am a nocturnal beggar.' Gauri-Ma's voice revealed her identity to the Mother at once, and she said, 'O, it's you Gaur-dasi, come, come. When did you arrive?' All of them then joined in a hearty laugh, whereas the mad aunt hid herself in shame in a room and did not stir out.

Whenever the Mother came to Jayrambati, she took up her abode in the house of uncle Prasanna. But now her retinue was big, the number of devotees was ever increasing, and her uncle's family, too, was expanding. So the Mother's further residence there became inconvenient from many points of view. So, another home was built for her on the western bank of Punya-pukur, at a total expenditure of about two thousand rupees. At the north-west corner of this homestead was a south-facing mud cottage for the Mother; south of this and facing west was a similar cottage to serve as a drawing-room or for the annual worship of Jagad-dhatri; opposite the Mother's cottage was that of her niece Nalini and the women devotees; at the north-east corner was the kitchen; north of the last cottage, again, there was another cooking shed. The home was ceremonially opened on May 15, 1916. Along with the land purchased for this new home was bought the Punya-pukur, which after necessary excavation formed a part of the homestead. The Mother lived here for about four years.

The opening day of the house was marred by an unhappy incident. The devotees of Koalpara helped in every possible way in the building of the home and arranging for its opening. But they took so much to heart the insolence

1. Begging is done in the day-time, begging at night is almost non-existent.

of a few rich and honoured gentlemen who arrogated to themselves the leadership in connection with the opening celebrations that they decided not to be present on that day. The Mother did not fail to notice their absence and felt ill at ease. She inquired about them, but got no explanation from any quarter. When a couple of days later they turned up carrying some necessities for the Mother's household, she asked them about their absence from the opening ceremony. Nalini Devi told her why they did not attend. The Mother knew now the cause of their keeping aloof, and she was also told that when she would go to Calcutta this time, those influential devotees would take her by way of Garbeta and not by way of Koalpara. At all this the Mother remarked, 'What impostors these are! The Koalpara boys there have built a post and have been keeping watch on the way for me and my devoted children. What trouble do they not face for our sake? Those others lack the capacity, and yet how they offend by their heedless words! And shall I have to go with all my companions by way of Garbeta, crossing all sorts of rivers and canals, just because such a one prefers it so? The Koalpara boys are my mainstay. Whatever anyone may say, I shall have to pass ever and anon through Koalpara.' This warm and affectionate talk of the Mother melted the hearts of the devotees; they knew that the Mother was a real mother.

Swami Saradananda was at Vrindaban at the time of the opening of the new home. He returned to Calcutta after a month and a half and then proceeded to Jayrambati to bring the Mother with him. The Mother had decided that the new house and some paddy fields purchased by her for Jagad-dhatri would be formed into a trust in the name of the goddess and the deed would be registered at Koalpara through the sub-registrar of Kotulpur. By that deed she would make the Belur Math responsible for the maintenance of the property and the continuance of the worship of the deity. After a brief stay at Jayrambati,

Swami Saradananda went with the Mother to Koalpara on July 6, 1916, and the deed was registered the next day according to plan. The courtesy shown to the sub-registrar by the Swami on this occasion underlined his attitude of stewardship of the Mother. The sub-registrar was a young Mohammedan, well below thirty years of age; yet the old Swami offered him cigarettes and fanned him, as though he (the Swami) was a common man. At last when the registration was over and the gentleman was sent off in a palanquin, he felt relieved.

That very night the party left for Vishnupur by bullock-carts. They arrived there in the morning and spent the whole day at Sureshwar Babu's house, from where they left for Calcutta by the night train. The Mother stayed at the 'Udbodhan' for about seven months and then started for Jayrambati on January 31, 1917. On the way she spent a couple of days at Koalpara.

This year the Jagad-dhatri worship was celebrated in the Mother's new home, and in her presence. Soon after the Durga festival, she kept on counting the days for the commencement of the other festival and saying, 'So many days are left. My mother used to make such and such preparation at this time; with what care did she do it all! Can you guess how things will be managed?' Ten days before the celebration, on the afternoon of the Kali worship, she said, 'My mother used to begin twirling off the wicks from today,' and she started making the wicks for the lights. On the day of worship, she went to the goddess again and again with the end of her cloth placed round her neck in token of extreme humility, and there she prayed with folded hands for the safe accomplishment of the ceremony. The priest was a Bhattacharya from Haldi-pukur, and the *tantradharaka* was the family guru¹ of her brothers. At the end of the worship the Mother saluted the guru and placed the dust of his feet on her head. When she approached

1. Spiritual teachership was hereditary, and still continues to be so in many cases, though the custom seems to be dying out.

the priest with a similar purpose, he drew back and expostulated, 'Mother, how is it that you make obeisance to us? Do, please bless us.' The family guru seemed to have come to his senses now; but instead of showing any modesty he supported his pose of superiority by quoting a Sanskrit verse which means, 'I salute that blessed guru through whom has been revealed the Reality by which is pervaded this whole spherical universe of sentient and insentient things.' The Mother lent support by saying, 'That's true to be sure,' and left the place.

Next morning, Lalu, the fisherman of Satbere, came and said, 'Dear aunt, I shall sing some *baul* songs.' The Mother did not agree and pointed out various inconveniences; but Lalu assured her that he himself would get together the canopy, the lantern, and such other paraphernalia, for which none else need take any trouble. The Mother still pleaded, 'Lalu, why should you invite the ridicule of people? Much better will it be if you simply sit before the goddess and sing to her a few songs.' But Lalu stuck to his plan. In the evening he spread out the canopy, hung up the lantern, wore the long robe of the *bauls*, and faced the audience with a small drum dangling from his shoulder. And then he sang some humorous songs, made all roar with laughter, and left the place triumphantly.

The Mother's health deteriorated soon after; and in January 1918, her temperature rose very high. As soon as Swami Saradananda knew of this, he started with his brother, Dr. Satishchandra Chakravarty, Dr. Kanjilal, Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma, Sarala Devi¹, and others and reached Jayrambati on January 21. The Mother said that she would take Kanjilal's medicine. That done, she recovered

1. As a little girl, she came to be known to Sister Nivedita and Sudhira Devi of the Nivedita School. At the age of nine or ten years, she met the Mother for the first time in her rented house on the Baghbazar Street; and from 1913 up to the passing away of the Mother she accompanied and served her at various periods and in diverse places as opportunity arose.

soon. But, perhaps, the greater result came from the presence of her beloved ones — the Swami and his companions. By getting them down to stay near herself and by being constantly engaged in thoughts of their comfort, she shook off the disease.

Some little trouble cropped up at Jayrambati at this time. To suppress all political activity in the country, the Government had arranged for a strict and elaborate police-vigilance. They watched the movements of all people, and came to the Mother's house to note down the names and whereabouts of all new-comers. Among the Mother's disciples could be counted some interneers; moreover, the frequent visits of East Bengal people raised the suspicion of the police all the more. In the police records the Mother's house was noted down as 'Mataji's (Mother's) Ashrama', which required close attention. The Koalpara Ashrama, too, shared a similar fate. This caused great anxiety to the Mother, and to remedy this Sri Bibhutibhushan Ghosh, a disciple of the Mother, brought to her house a superior police officer from the district headquarters to have personal acquaintance with the actual state of things. The officer was highly impressed by the courtesy and affection of the Mother, and when taking leave inquired whether she was afraid of the police. Bibhutibhushan tried to evade the question just to save the Mother from giving an unpleasant direct answer. But she said frankly, 'There is fear, to be sure, my son.' The police officer promised to ease the situation; and as a matter of fact, the police relaxed their surveillance after this visit. They now remained satisfied with noting down names and collecting general information, and the local sub-inspector of police held the Mother in great honour. When Swami Saradananda arrived at Jayrambati, the village watchman (*chaukidar*) came to note down the names of the whole party. And lest any negligence on their part should embarrass the Mother later on, Swami Saradananda saw to it that all information was scrupulously supplied.

The Swami had planned to take the Mother with him to Calcutta; but the Mother declined; and so he left Jayrambati leaving behind Sarala Devi for the Mother's service and another devotee to accompany the Mother to Calcutta in case she should change her mind. But when even after a fortnight there was no indication of such a change this devotee also took leave of her.

On the eve of the Sivaratri day (some time in late February) 1918, the village watchman Ambika came with the information that on the morrow the sub-inspector of the Shiromanipur police station would visit the Mother's house. Some time earlier Swami Jnanananda, who had been suffering from malaria, had gone to Katihar to Dr. Aghornath Ghosh's house to be treated by him. While staying there he got information of the Mother's illness at Jayrambati and visited her there. On his return to Katihar, the police falsely concluded that Swami Jnanananda was none other than a brother of Dr. Aghornath who had been absconding for political reasons and was now living incognito in the doctor's house under a monk's garb. And thus a silly but vigorous investigation was set in motion for ascertaining the antecedents of Jnanananda. Ambika said that the talks at the police station indicated that the sub-inspector's visit was only a part of that inquiry. That in itself was a simple affair; but nobody could be too sure of the whims of the all-powerful police of those dark days, particularly in the face of the Sindhubala incident which had happened in a nearby village some time back. But though the Mother's household was thus perturbed over the prospect of a visitation from the police, in the Mother's face could be seen absolute peace and assurance; and others, too, kept fairly calm for the being. At night also the Mother sat by her sons at meal-time, as usual, and she seemed totally unexcited.

Fortunately, Sri Manindranath Bose, a lawyer of Arambagh and a disciple of the Mother, came to see her the next day. The Mother was pleased to see him; and

her attendant told him everything concerning the forthcoming police inquiry. The sub-inspector came at sunset with his constables, and Manindranath entered into a conversation with him. In the meantime the Mother sent word from the inner apartment that she had arranged for a little refreshment for them. So Manindranath and the sub-inspector went in, saluted the Mother, and ate heartily what she placed before them. The police officer was overjoyed at the Mother's tender consideration for him and ended the investigation in a most friendly manner.

The Mother had not gone to Calcutta, but had stayed on at Jayrambati; and the Koalpara people pleaded that it would please them immensely and would do her health some good if she lived with them for some days. The Mother readily consented and went to stay there for about two months, returning to Jayrambati on the 15th of Vaishakha (April 30), 1918. According to the Mother's direction, Brahmachari Varada lived at Jayrambati during her absence. One noon, at about eleven, on reaching the Jagadamba-Ashrama (Mother's quarters at Koalpara) he found the place rather agitated. On inquiry he learnt that the Mother was in a state of spiritual ecstasy — she had lost consciousness while uttering 'Master'. When they sprinkled water on her face and eyes and she came to the normal plane, Nalini Devi asked her, 'Dear aunt, why was it so?' The Mother replied, 'Why, what did you see? That's nothing. My head reeled all of a sudden as I was passing the thread through the eye of the needle.' Long after, during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', the Mother said to Varada with reference to this incident, 'I had come with a weak body from Jayrambati and was one day sitting on the verandah. A little away, Nalini and others were busy in some sort of sewing. The sun was high up — quite glaring. I saw, as though the Master entered by the main entrance, seated himself on the cool verandah, and at once lay down. At this sight I hurried to spread for him the end of my cloth when I felt a strange

sensation. Kedar's mother and others raised a hue and cry; and so I told them, then, that it was nothing.' The Mother had visions of the Master at Koalpara even after the incident narrated here; for during the same conversation with Varada, she added, 'I had such high temperature at Koalpara that I lay on my bed unconscious and unmindful of decorum. But whenever I came to my senses and called on him (the Master) for the sake of this body, I had his vision.'

Towards the end of her stay at Koalpara she had an attack of malaria with high temperature which rose to 103° at noon. This was too much for her weak and frail body to bear. When the fever rose, she felt a burning sensation on her palms and groped for something cool to lay them on. But as ice was not available, her hands were often placed on some one's cool bare body. During the height of the fever she inquired about Swami Saradananda who was then in Calcutta. As the fever did not abate, he was informed by wire to which he responded by sending Dr. Kanjilal with attendants for the Mother, and he himself followed them to Koalpara on April 17, with Dr. Satish Chakravarty and Yogin-Ma. The Swami went from the carriage straight to the Mother's bed-side and sat quietly near her head. The temperature was then going up, and the Mother seemed to be feeling for something. The Swami learnt on inquiry that she wanted something cool to lay her hands on. He removed his shirt at once and placed her hands on his cool bare body. The Mother getting relief thereby, said, 'Ah!' and looked up at the Swami, but contrary to her habit, she did not draw her veil, so that the people present concluded that she did not fully recognize the Swami owing to her semi-conscious state, for she was known for her shyness before him. The fever left the next day and she took solid food on April 21, when Dr. Kanjilal left.

The Mother gradually gathered strength; and, then, Swami Saradananda said one morning, 'Mother, we are

not going to leave you behind this time—we shall take you to Calcutta with us.’ The Mother did not object, but said, ‘But my son, I shall have to go to Jayrambati once to re-start on an auspicious day.’ So she went with others to Jayrambati on April 29. As the news of her return spread, the village women flocked there and said, ‘Mother, we had almost despaired of seeing you again. It gives us great joy to find you back here with all others.’ The Mother said, ‘Yes, mother. I suffered very much because of the disease. But then Sarat, Kanjilal, and others came up, and through the grace of Simhavahini, I am spared this time. Sarat asks me to go to Calcutta. If you all agree, I can go and come back after recouping a little.’ All heartily welcomed the proposal.

During the Mother’s illness at Koalpara, Radhu had, of her own accord, left all of a sudden for her husband’s home at Tajpur. The Mother now sent a messenger to ascertain whether she would go to Calcutta. Radhu declined the offer.

The Mother was to stay at Jayrambati for about a week. On the day before leaving the village, it began to rain heavily when the monks and Brahmacharis sat for their food, the Mother serving them. As the rain splashed on the verandah where they sat, Swami Saradananda drew together all the leaves to a safer place on the west and arranged for a joint lunch from a common heap. The junior Brahmacharis naturally felt somewhat ill at ease in eating jointly with such an august person as the Swami; but his insistence and the happy smile on the Mother’s face encouraged them.

On May 5, 1918, the Mother went to Koalpara and had a day’s rest there. On the morrow she left for Vishnupur in a carriage and reached Calcutta on the morning of May 7.

One of the saddest events in the Mother’s life during her stay at this time at the ‘Udbodhan’ was the passing away of Swami Premananda on July 30. Her eyes were

wet from the morning of that sorrowful day; and when in the afternoon came the stunning news of his departure, she wept bitterly and said, 'Baburam (Premananda) was so very near to my heart! All the energy, devotion, and wisdom of the Belur Math were impersonated in the form of my Baburam and walked there on the bank of the Ganges.' Recovering a little from the first shock, she laid her head at the feet of the Master's large picture in the middle room and cried out with a heart-rending wail, 'Master, so you have snatched him away!' At this scene none present could check his or her tears.

RADHU

Radhu's health and behaviour were quite good in her early years. Her childlike simplicity pleased everybody. She had no worry for the future and no attraction for money. To her the Mother was 'Mummy', and her own mother, 'Bald mummy', for the mad aunt had her hair cropped short. As the Holy Mother distributed her things rather liberally, Radhu's mother became jealous, and sometimes cantankerously rapped out, 'She is giving away everything; what will happen to Radhi in future?' And sometimes she harangued to her daughter, 'The sister-in-law is giving away everything to others; she is not laying by anything for you. Why do you stay on there? Come away to my room.' Radhu showed her annoyance at such advice gratis and scolded and motioned her 'Bald mummy' away. She needed little; for the Mother gave her plentifully. She loved those gifts, to be sure. But if others had a share of the Mother's bounty and clung to their presents, Radhu had no reason to be envious.

She was very good-natured indeed. But as ill luck would have it, she fell ill; and after her marriage, her temper degenerated in proportion as her health deteriorated. Noticing this the Mother once said to Kedar, 'What shall I tell you, my son? Formerly she was quite good. But nowadays she has become physically weak; and on top of everything she is married! Now I am afraid that she might ultimately turn mad as she is born of an insane mother. Have I after all brought up a lunatic?' In reality the Mother had to put up with not a little worry and suffering because of Radhu, although she had accepted her whole-heartedly at the bidding of the Master who indicated in a vision that Radhu was none other than Yoga-maya come down to provide a downward pull for the Mother's mind which would otherwise be lost

in lofty spiritual flight. Indeed, Radhu was fast tending to be a problem-girl and a source of worry and anxiety to the Mother. She became increasingly irascible and incoherent in talk. This becomes clear from some of the casual remarks of the Mother. When a woman devotee proposed to bring up a boy, the Mother drew her attention to her own condition owing to Radhu and said, 'Don't take up such a burden. Do your duty by every one; but love none but God. One has to suffer much if one loves.' On another occasion she said, 'Don't you see, how I suffer because of Radhu?' And with deeper regret the Mother said at the 'Udbodhan' one day, 'Do you notice, my daughter, how strange is this play of the Master? What a fine lot he has made of my mother's family. See what kind of company I have to keep. As for this one (Radhu's mother) she is rank mad; another (Nalini) is verging on insanity. And see there's another still (Radhu)! My daughter, what a strange being I brought up! She has not an iota of intelligence. She is standing there holding the railing—watching for her husband's return. She is afraid in her mind, lest he should get in where that music is going on. She is vigilant day and night. What an attachment, my daughter! I never knew that she would have so much attachment.'

Radhu really served two purposes in the Mother's life—on the one hand she acted like a bond binding her heart to this world, and on the other she supplied a background for the expression of her motherly qualities. (The greatness that manifested itself in the midst of the currents and cross-currents of this world could not otherwise have been easily comprehended. Greatness that is heightened by exceptionally favourable circumstances may evoke the comment from the householders,) 'We have nothing to learn from it; for we cannot hope to command such ideal conditions.' And, again, when the monks praise absolute detachment from worldly preoccupations, some wiseacres may laugh in their sleeves and say, 'These people know

nothing of the pleasures of this world, and yet conjure up a doleful picture of the world before their mind's eye to condemn it for no fault of its own.' The Holy Mother's life is full of meaning for either kind of critics. For she accepted the world *in toto* and played her game in it faultlessly. Her words are all soaked in life's experience; and yet every move she makes, sends forth bright rays of a light beyond.

In the second week of June 1918, Radhu had a boil on her finger; and she wanted to go to the Mother at Calcutta. The Mother, therefore, wrote to Kedar of Koalpara that Radhu would be proceeding to Calcutta with her mother and husband, and that if Radhu should so desire, Brahmachari Varada should be permitted to accompany the party. Radhu did, of course, want Varada; and he, too, travelled with them. When Radhu recovered, Varada escorted her mother back to Jayrambati. He had to proceed to Calcutta again in the beginning of winter when Radhu's mother wanted to see her daughter who was ailing there.

On December 31, 1918, Swami Shivananda announced at the Belur Math that Swami Saradananda had sent word about the Holy Mother's coming to the Math with Radhu that very afternoon, and that she would live in the adjoining northern garden house, which should accordingly be tidied up. Radhu was in the family way, and her nerves had become so sensitive that she could not bear any sound. The Mother had chosen that quiet house with the idea that it would soothe Radhu's nerves. But that very day further news came that Radhu would not be coming; for she had calculated that the Belur Math would really be a noisy place for several reasons: just on the border of the garden house was located the Math chapel where during worship they would ring bells. In the evening they would sing hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments; in front there was the Ganges over which plied a number of steamers which have their screaming sirens; and near

at hand was the birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda, which was bound to attract a large number of devotees. The Mother had, therefore, to go to a comparatively quieter place in the city—the boarding house of the Nivedita Girls' School! The very next morning Swami Shivananda sent Brahmachari Varada to inquire about the Mother's comforts. Finding him, the Mother said dismally, 'Here I am at last in this sea of trouble. I don't know, Varada, what is in store. And yet wait and see how long after all she continues here. Radhu is in bed all the time; her heart can bear no sound. I don't know, my boy, what disease it is! The Master alone knows how she will be saved.'

After a few days the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? Radhu doesn't like even this place any longer. She says, "Let's go to the country." But you know her condition well enough. Is there any good doctor or Kaviraj to be had in the country? What a lot of advantages we have here. But she will always have her own way. Let us wait and see how things shape themselves.' On the birthday of Swami Vivekananda it was rumoured at the Belur Math that the Mother would be going to her village home the next day. Varada was duly sent for; he would have to accompany the Mother. When the Brahmachari reached the 'Udbodhan', he found the Mother busy packing up. At the sight of Varada, she said gloomily, 'I am going to the country to drift in this unfathomable sea (meaning Radhu). You all will be my mainstay there. Sort out these articles properly, pack and bind them up securely. Nothing has been arranged so far. I was waiting for you till now.' When Varada got down late at night after finishing the packing, Swami Saradananda told him, 'It's my wish that you should stay with the Mother as long as she needs you.' Varada readily agreed, and continued to be at her service till the last day of her life.

Next morning the Mother started by train for Vishnupur with Radhu and Radhu's mother, Nalini Devi and

Maku, the widow (Mandakini Roy) of Navasan¹, and others. Two monks escorted them up to Vishnupur, where they lodged at the house of Sri Sureshwar Sen. Next morning at tea-time, Sureshwar brought a young man of about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age and introduced him saying, 'This is a good astrologer who has his home here. In Calcutta he studies under and lives with a teacher who is a noted astrologer.' This aroused everybody's interest, and each wanted the marks on his or her palm to be interpreted. Reading Radhu's palm the astrologer predicted, 'She won't have an easy delivery.' And studying Maku's palm he foretold, 'Several successive children of hers will not meet each other.' At this Maku hustled to the Mother and began to cry. The Mother consoled her in many ways and then calling the astrologer to herself told him, 'My boy, you are still young. If you had noticed such a portent, it would have been much better to have told us of it apart. Be that as it may, you now tell me of some remedy that you may have in your astrology. If I don't do any such thing how can I pacify Maku? And then let the Lord's will be done.' The astrologer said, 'According to us, she should now either read the *Chandi* or hear it read for three consecutive Tuesdays; and then there should be a *homa* and other auspicious rites.' Maku's son Neda was then two and a half years old, and he was very healthy, intelligent, and lovable. And Maku expected another child in a couple of months. So the prophecy of the astrologer had a very depressing effect on everybody.

Early in the morning on January 29, 1919, the party left in six bullock-carts and after reaching Jaypur at a distance of eight miles halted for cooking for the noon.

1. She was married in a Kayastha family of Navasan, a village within the Goghat police station of the Hooghly district and only a few miles away from Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. She had no issue and her husband died early. She became a disciple and then an attendant of the Mother. In the Mother's household she was known as the daughter-in-law of Navasan. For convenience we refer to her as 'the widow.'

The rice was being boiled in an earthen pot. When it was ready and the cook wanted to take it down for removing the gruel, the vessel burst and fell down. This created a real problem, for such food could not be offered to the Master, and cooking again would mean great delay. But the Mother remained undisturbed. She carefully removed the rice from the top of the scattered heap to some leaves and adroitly separated the gruel from it. Then she washed her hands and brought out the picture of the Master from her box. Along with the rice she served some curry and lentil soup for the Master and said with folded hands, 'This is how you have ordained it today. Now take some warm food without delay.' The Mother's talk and movements set all laughing; but nothing perturbed, she said calmly, 'I have to adjust according to time and circumstances. Come now, do you all sit down for food.' The carts restarted as soon as all had finished taking their food. But they could not reach Koalpara before eleven o'clock in the night.

According to a previous plan, the Mother was to remain at Koalpara for a day or two; but the solitude of the village brought sound sleep to Radhu, and she insisted on continuing there. And in consultation with uncle Kali and others, the Mother also concluded that all things taken together, Koalpara was preferable to Jayrambati. Accordingly, from that time till the 7th of Shravana (July 22), 1919, the Mother stayed on at the Jagadamba-Ashrama at Koalpara. For the reader's help we should add here a few words about the locality.

The Ashrama at Koalpara stands on the main road from Kotulpur to Desra on way to Jayrambati. The Jagadamba-Ashrama, where the Mother lived, was at the farthest end of the village, and about a furlong east of the monastery. This homestead was in a solitary place and was surrounded by high walls. The cottage meant for the Mother was spacious and had a cemented floor. Near it was the kitchen. A big cottage at the south-east corner

could accommodate seven or eight women devotees. And another cottage at the south-west corner served as a waiting room for the men devotees who came to see the Mother in the day-time. On the inner verandah of this cottage was a husking machine. South of this group of cottages, at a distance of about fifty yards, was Kedar's dwelling house. Before the Jagadamba-Ashrama was built, the Mother used to reside here when passing through Koalpara. These latter precincts had a big cottage facing east; east of that was the small family chapel of Kedar. On the north was a cowshed; and the whole place was surrounded by a wall, outside which, on the east and south, were thick bushes of thorny plants; on the west was a small pond, and on the north some quince and tamarind trees. It was a somewhat isolated homestead. Even so, Radhu selected this dreary place for her residence.

Many monks and devotees came to Koalpara as they found the Mother more easily accessible here than in Calcutta. All the men had their food at the main Ashrama, while the women had theirs at the Jagadamba-Ashrama. The total number of inmates at both the places often rose to as high as forty.

After spending there just a few days, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Something has happened to me lately—whatever thought arises in my mind comes true, be it good or bad. Radhu has taken a fancy to this wild jungle, for it is quiet. But it strikes me that though you may have to go out on business throughout the day-time, you should remain here with me from evening and have your food here. I am rather nervous here, my boy! I have told (Brahmachari) Rajen, too; he will be able to come at about ten or eleven after finishing his work at the Ashrama.' From that day on, Varada returned every evening and sat on a cot under the quince in front of Radhu's cottage. The Mother, too, came and talked in a low tone; for Radhu then lay in her bed and could not bear to hear any sound whatever. The slightest noise set her heart beating

fast. And hence all metallic things—the handles of buckets, door chains, etc.,—had cotton wrappings round them. One day the Mother said, ‘Look here, how thick this jungle is! I shouldn’t wonder if someday a bear should make its appearance here.’ Varada assured her that that part of the country was free from bears. Yet the Mother added, ‘Who knows, my boy? How dark it is here! I am afraid.’ In a day or two, it was actually reported that in the field of Desra, only a mile away, a huge bear had appeared and mauled to death an old woman as she was picking up cowdung, and that the beast, too, had been shot dead. In the evening the Mother said, ‘So you see what a horrible thing the bear has done today! They say that it has killed the mother-in-law of Ambika (the village watchman). Yet did you not assert that there were no bears in these parts?’

As suggested by the astrologer of Vishnupur, many auspicious rites were gone through for a whole week for warding off the evil portent from Maku. And then in the evening the Mother sat under the quince and said, ‘What a lot of difficulties I had to live in at the Nahabat for the service of the Master; and yet there was no consciousness of any inconvenience, the day passed off merrily without any notice. And here I am now in all sorts of trouble because of these people. The rites for Maku’s solace are over today. I am sitting here with you in the jungle to the detriment of all my religious practices, *japa*, and penances. And now I should thank my lot if, through God’s grace, nothing untoward happens to Radhu.’ As the talk went on, the widow of Navasan came up and said, ‘O brother, did you hear? At noon today, I was sitting here on the verandah with the Mother; all was quiet. The Mother said, “Those two crows used to come here till a few days ago to perch on yonder tree and caw. This irritated Radhu. But, well, for some days now they haven’t been seen.” Hardly had the Mother finished than the crows came and cawed from the tree.’ The Mother smiled and corroborated the story saying ‘Yes, my boy.’

In the middle of June 1919, it had rained heavily for some days, when one night, at about ten o'clock, they sat under the tree. The Mother said all of a sudden, 'Look here, that lunatic of Shihar has not been coming here for a long time. He is stark mad. But he is good at singing, for instance. But I am afraid, my boy, lest he should begin shouting.' The widow of Navasan protested, 'Why, again, do you mention him, Mother? Suppose he pops out at this dead of night!' The Mother replied, 'Who knows, my daughter! And what an apprehension you have! How can he come crossing the river in this rainy season?' Before silence had dropped over her words, the lunatic made his appearance with a bundle of vegetables under his arm and a large hat of palm leaves on his head. He said to the Mother, 'Here I am with some vegetables for you.' The widow of Navasan ran to a room and bolted the door. The Mother said softly, 'Go away, don't you make any noise at this late hour of the night.' He replied, 'How can I go now? The river is in flood!' 'Then how did you come?' queried Varada. 'I crossed by swimming,' replied the man. The Mother again said in a very persuasive and sweet voice, 'My good man, don't you create any disturbance.' The man at once left the place calmly and slowly. After this event the Holy Mother had a fairly quiet time there.

Radhu's disease, however, showed no sign of improvement, rather it worsened day by day. Sympathetic people were not wanting, each of whom had a remedy to prescribe. The Mother politely listened to them all, and in all possible cases acted up to those suggestions, for she did not want to offend anybody if that could be helped. In the beginning of March 1919, Nalini Devi said, 'Mind you, aunt, when Radhu's mother became mad, it was you who made her wear the bangle of the "Mad Kali" of Tirol; and only then did she come round. I think, Radhu also will fully recover if she wears the bangle. She also has got a touch of insanity; otherwise how could she be sleeping all the

time like that, though she is quite normal so far as food and such things are concerned.' Accordingly, the Mother sent some one to Tirol, seventeen miles away, to bring the bangle after offering due worship to Kali there. As the bangle arrived at night, it was kept hanging on a tree, for it was not to touch the ground. Next morning Radhu wore it; but there was no result, except that Radhu's mother became all the more quarrelsome and went on abusing Nalini Devi without rime or reason. After a few days, the mad aunt told the Mother, 'Why did you bring Radhu here from Calcutta? It would have been far better in Calcutta. Here it is hot; and Radhu would recover if ice could be applied.' To pacify the aunt, the Mother had ice brought from Vishnupur. As this was being applied to Radhu's head, uncle Kali turned up and said, 'Sister, what a pity that you consented to apply ice on the advice of that mad woman to an enceinte's head! God be thanked, if the cold does not produce something worse. Sister, you don't understand; it's no disease at all, for otherwise the big doctors of Calcutta would not have failed. She is perhaps possessed by some god or ghost. At Sushnegede there is a Chandali¹ who is an adept in the *tantrika*² cult. Why should we not get him to try his skill on her?' The ice pack was then given up, and uncle Kali was asked to bring the *tantrika* adept. As the uncle and Varada reached the man's place, he scattered some mustard seeds over their bodies and declared solemnly, 'Yes, I have understood it all; I have got the command, I shall have to go there in a day or two.'

As the *tantrika* arrived the following afternoon, the Mother saluted him with the greatest humility and described Radhu's condition with tearful eyes in a way as though the *tantrika* alone could save her from the insur-

1. A man of a very low caste.

2. Tantras are scriptures associated in popular belief with occult practices which are supposed to bestow supernormal powers to their followers, the *tantrikas*.

mountable difficulty in which she was placed. The man was satisfied on examination of the patient that it was a genuine case of supernatural influence. But the remedy that he prescribed was altogether beyond the competence of anyone to procure. The oil and liver of a *rohita* fish (*cyprinus rohita*, carp) weighing more than forty pounds were to be boiled in the oil extracted from black gingili seeds by grinding them in a village oil-press; and with these were to be cooked iron, various scented articles, the dung of a bull, and such other ingredients to be picked up from various inaccessible places. The resulting ointment had to be rubbed on Radhu's body, and she had to wear an amulet. The Mother evinced the greatest interest at first; but when it became clear that it was a wholly absurd prescription, she became despondent and said, 'There's no gainsaying that I am reverential to all the deities and am craving their favour; but none is kindly disposed. It'll be as the Lord wills, as it is written on Radhu's forehead (by the fingers of Destiny)! Master, you are the only saviour!' This mood of absolute dependence on Providence renders the Mother extraordinarily attractive.

On the advice of some well-wishers, the Mother also agreed to invoke the help of a *Chanda* (a fierce spirit) through adequate rites. In an abandoned shed outside the Ashrama, the *Chanda* was duly summoned by charms, worship, and sacrifice. In the consequent seance the spirit prescribed many queer medicines and gave directions for procuring an oil from the demonologist's house. Everything was done. But Radhu's ailment defied all these attempts at treatment.

Out of a sense of duty and for the solace of all the Mother had many such things done. And yet her faith in Providence never wavered, and her detachment never flickered. One day, when somebody proposed that for Radhu's safe delivery a certain doctor should be called in, she revealed her real mind by saying, 'Aren't the bitches and vixens of the forests delivered of their litter?'

In the middle of May 1919, news reached Koalpara that the mother of the widow of Navasan lay ill at home without any hope of recovery and without anybody to nurse her. The Mother had her brought to Koalpara and sent for doctor Prabhakar Mukherji of Arambagh, a disciple of hers. The doctor came; but the old woman did not live for long. She breathed her last a few days later.

In the meantime two events had happened: the first was the death of Maku's son Neda on April 20, 1919. This boy of extraordinary qualities was a pet of the Mother, and the blow caused extreme grief. The second event was Radhu's giving birth to a child without any accident. Her protracted neurasthenia had led doctors to opine that an operation might be necessary at the time of delivery; and hence at the bidding of Swami Saradananda, Dr. Vaikuntha (afterwards Swami Maheshwarananda) and Sarala Devi proceeded to Koalpara. But everyone was surprised to see Radhu give birth to a son on the 24th of Vaishakha (May 9), without much trouble. Radhu, however, continued ailing even after this, and her nervous troubles was somewhat aggravated. Neda's death followed by this set-back in Radhu's condition completely overwhelmed the Mother; she wept as she talked of these things. After the death of the mother of the widow of Navasan, Dr. Mukheri came to take leave of the Mother and said with folded hands, 'Mother, the world is full of sorrows. There's no escape since I am already in it! Mother, how can we get peace? The world is quite galling to me!' The Mother said very sympathetically and with tears in her eyes, 'True enough, my son, there's no joy in the world. The Master is our only refuge. But, my son, it is a great sin to lead a worldly life or to live with one's relatives. I committed a blunder by getting Radhu married and now I am suffering.'

The Mother had at first fixed the 4th of Shravana (July 19), 1919, as the date for going to Jayrambati. But as it rained heavily, she went there only on the seventh of

Shravana. For some seven or eight months following child-birth, Radhu remained so weak that she could not stand up or walk. She simply crawled along; and she did not wear any clothes, so that her dwelling place had to be screened off with cloth. At times she became so intractable that she had to be forcibly carried to her bed. Some thought that it was all sheer madness; while others believed it to be real weakness. And to crown it all, she had become addicted to opium and pestered the Mother for increasing the dose. The Mother tried all the while to cure her of this by stages; but Radhu would not agree. Recently the Mother had been in poor health, and to add to her suffering there were all these additional troubles. One day the Mother was dressing vegetables, when Radhu approached her. The Mother knew her motive and, therefore, argued with her, 'Radhi, why do you continue thus? Stand up straight now; I am fed up with you. I am going to lose my religious practices, duties, money, and all for your sake. Can you tell me from where to meet all these expenses?' Radhu became furious at this and taking up a big egg-fruit from the basket in front, struck at the Mother's back with all her might. As it fell with a thud, the Mother bent her back in pain and the place became red and swollen. But unmindful of this, she turned to the Master and prayed with folded hands, 'Master, don't be offended at her; she is ignorant.' Then taking the dust of her own feet in hand, she rubbed it over Radhu's head and said, 'Radhi, the Master never uttered a harsh word against this body, and you inflict such pain on it! How can you evaluate my worth? How lightly do you mean to deal with me just because I have chosen to live amidst you all?' Radhu then began to weep. And the Mother continued, 'Radhi, if I become offended, then you can find no shelter anywhere in the three worlds. Master, don't be offended with her.'

Sometimes before Radhu's son was born, a strange transformation had been creeping over her demeanour;

and just then the Mother was getting ready for her final departure — there were only two and a half years left for the concluding of that divine drama. The devotees had heard that the day when the Mother's heart would be detached from Radhu, there would remain no means to arrest its natural gravitation towards the state beyond all worldly encumbrances. Then the curtain would drop on her playing her part as a human being. Now through the wishes of Sri Ramakrishna, those affectionate cords which tied her to this world seemed to be snapping one by one.

The Mother's mind had been getting detached from Radhu for the last few years. Even in her early age Radhu had contracted diseases, and there was no end to her malady. In addition, her temper worsened day by day. At this the Holy Mother remarked, as early as the middle of May 1913, 'I have no attachment to this Radhi. Coming in constant touch with diseases my mind has developed a dislike, but I keep it there by force, and say, "Master, let my mind be a little attached to Radhi, otherwise who will take care of her?"' I never have seen such morbidity. She must have died of some disease in a previous birth before she could undertake any expiatory rites!' Although the Mother tried to keep her mind in this world, the mind refused to be pinned down. As an ostensible reason for this the devotees came to know, only of Radhu's diseased mind and body. The Mother had given her a good training, but Radhu's mental make-up was not high enough to be benefited thereby. The Mother's affection did not soften her, but made her all the more petulant and impudent. And her mother's insanity, too, penetrated somewhat into her character, thereby making her conduct towards the Mother repugnant to others. At last she came to disrespect, abuse, and beat the Holy Mother. Staggered at this development in her behaviour, the Holy Mother once said, 'Radhi, though you have been fed with the milk of a lioness, you continue to be the vixen that you are. What

pains have I not taken to make you a worthy person, but you have imbibed nothing of my goodness; you have taken wholly after your mother.' Radhu became enraged at this and drew the veil over her face. Amused at this the Mother remarked, 'You can't do without me, and yet you draw the veil at the sight of my face!'

The matter did not stop here. Once the Mother was going by bullock-cart from Vishnupur to Jayrambati. When the cart was approaching Kotulpur, Radhu, who was also in it, went on pushing the Mother with her feet and saying, 'Off with you, get away; get you down from this cart.' The Mother moved away from her to the farthest limit as she kept on saying, 'If I go, then who will do all these penances for you?' Another day, as Radhu kicked her, she took the dust of her feet and placed it on Radhu's head saying, 'What have you done Radhi, what have you done?'

Radhu's oppression of the Mother increased apace, and the Holy Mother by degrees, withdrew her thoughts from her. Now who can say which of these was the earlier? It rather strikes us that by divine dispensation the basic fact of disentanglement antecedent to final dissociation from life was taking shape simultaneously at both ends. At the time of leaving for Calcutta at the beginning of May 1918, the Mother wanted to see Radhu and had her brought from her father-in-law's house. As soon as she got down from the palanquin, the Mother greeted her warmly saying, 'Come, my daughter, Radhu', and pressed her to her bosom. But she was now aware that Radhu's individuality was fully developed; she had wilfully gone to her husband at Tajpur leaving behind the Holy Mother in her sick-bed at Koalpara, and later when the Mother had inquired if she would go to Calcutta, she had declined. The Mother took due account of Radhu's wishes and arranged for sending her back to her husband. At the time of parting Radhu wept bitterly and saluted the Mother by falling down at her feet; but the Mother remained totally

unmoved, though she blessed her cheerfully, and bade farewell to her quietly as she would have done to anyone else. A by-stander, not knowing them personally, could not believe that they were really Radhu and the Mother!

We now come to the beginning of April 1920. Radhu was then at Calcutta with the Mother, and her son was also there. Regretfully the Mother said, 'I have lost all for Radhu, my health, my spiritual exercises, money, indeed everything. And she is almost on the point of killing her son. He has somehow been saved on being handed over to Sarala after his coming here. And Kanjilal is treating him. As for Kanjilal he has declared already, "I shan't be able to treat the boy if he is in Radhu's keeping." I don't know what's there in the Master's mind; what's the meaning of giving her a son when she doesn't know so much as how to take care of her own person? And furthermore, she has developed a disease again. What's all this come to, my daughter? Whatever that may be, I am fed up with them. How outrageous was their conduct at home! Did they care for me at all?'

It is the Bengali New Year's day, in the middle of April 1920. The evening service at the 'Udbodhan' is over. It is not yet time to feed Radhu's son; some one has gone to call Sarala Devi for the purpose. But the child is crying; hence Radhu insists on feeding him forthwith. As the Mother forbids her, she flares up and curses the Mother, 'May you die, may your mouth be on (funeral) fire,' and so on. The Mother has been fighting for a long time with disease and truculence; and now she is a bed-ridden patient when her life is ebbing away and patience has reached its last limit. She can bear it no longer; and with the greatest pain mixed with the highest affection she says, 'Yes, you will know what straits you will be reduced to once I am gone.¹ Today, on this New Year's day, I wish it

1. Nine months after the Mother's departure, Radhu's husband Manmatha married a second time and deprived of the love of her husband Radhu took her abode at Jayrambati. Manmatha's economic condition deteriorated at

so truly that you may die first and then I pass away in comfort.' Radhu could, however, hardly recognize the hidden touch of love, she could only see the indifference on the surface. With mortification the Mother said at last to a devotee, 'Fan me, my daughter, oppression from her burns me to the very bone.'

The Mother continued on this earth only for three months after this.

MISTRESS OF THE HOME

As the reader came to the end of the previous chapter, he must have heaved a deep sigh and said with the Bengali poet, 'You descended on earth for the good of people, and yet what tribulation had you to undergo!' We are constrained nevertheless to present in this chapter yet another doleful tale. And while on this task, we have to remember that we shall miss the import of the lives of those who descended for the betterment of this world in this age, if we study them merely against the background of the past. For in these lives there is not only to be seen the highest detachment, but also the most earnest desire to do good. In these lives the moral qualities like forbearance and kindness which are associated with saints were not practised in caves or secluded places but in the din and bustle of towns. Sri Ramakrishna, who was renunciation incarnate, never shunned his duty towards his mother, shed profuse tears at the death of his nephew Akshay, accepted his wife when she came to him and trained her up to carry on his message after him, and spent his whole life in the service of needy souls. Swami Vivekananda shed the last drop of his blood for the service of his own mother, motherland, and the God in men. The Mother's mind was never attached to the world in the ordinary sense of the term; and yet the actions and reactions of domestic contacts produced in her life such motherly love, patience, compassion, and endurance as were unparalleled; and because of this rare combination their bearing either on present-day or future society is not easy to assess, though even to us of the modern age there should be no doubt as to their far-reaching influence on ages to come. Hence it is useless to spend our time in discovering any meaning; it is much better to proceed with the life-history as we find it.

Revered Yogin-Ma had once this doubt in her mind: 'I have seen the Master as a man of extreme renunciation;

but I find the Mother so worldly-minded! Day and night she is occupied with her brothers, nephews, and nieces.' Then, one day, as she sat in *japa* on the bank of the Ganges, she had a vision in which the Master appeared to her and said, 'See, see, what is floating down the Ganges.' Yogin-Ma saw a newly born babe, red with blood and wound round in its navel string, being carried away by the current. The Master commented, 'Can the Ganges be polluted at any time? Think of her (the Mother) also in that way. Don't entertain these doubts. Know her and this (pointing to his own body) as identical.'

In studying the domestic life of the Mother, the first thing that strikes us is her non-attachment. She does her duties, to be sure; nay, it appears at times as if she was as much affected by the sorrows of the world as any other person; but the next moment an innate serenity that defies all vicissitudes emerges brilliantly like the moon freed from a passing cloud.

At the end of December 1918, the Mother sat on the porch near the main entrance of her house, while the monks sat on the verandah of the parlour. In front moved the loads of paddy towards the farm-yard of uncles Varada and Kali. The fencing put up by the latter outside his threshing floor had encroached a little on the road, so that the paddy bags coming to uncle Varada's barn could not pass through easily. This gave rise to an altercation between the two brothers, and a scuffle was about to ensue when the Mother, no longer able to sit indifferently, rushed to the place and, to pacify them, sometimes said to the one, 'It's your fault', and sometimes dragged the other by the hand. She was much older than either of the brothers, who had, in fact, been brought up by her. Hence they could not ignore their sister altogether; her intervention stopped them from coming to blows. Nevertheless, she could not stop them from exchanging hot words. She, however, kept standing between them. Just then the monks came to her rescue, and the brothers walked away cursing

each other. The Mother was excited, no doubt; and in a flurry she returned and sat down on the verandah of her house. And then in the twinkling of an eye her anger and agitation were nowhere; on the contrary, the eternal peace behind all clashes of worldly interest on this stage of life's drama revealed itself before her eyes to evoke a hearty laugh; and she said, 'What a maya (magic) is this of the Mahamaya (Conjuror). There stretches the infinite earth, and these possessions, too, will be left behind. Can't man understand this simple fact?' And she burst into a fit of laughter that lasted pretty long.

At noon on the last day of the month of Paush (about January 15), the Mother made her sons sit for eating cakes on the verandah of uncle Prasanna, while she herself sat by them to see that they were properly served. Nearby the mad aunt and Nalini Devi kept busy arranging things to be sent as gifts on that happy day to the houses of the fathers-in-law of Radhu and Maku respectively. Now and then they came to the Mother to consult her and apprise her of the articles being sent. The gifts were being drawn from her store and at her cost. And yet she did not seem to evince any interest; but in an absent-minded way answered 'yes' or 'no' to their eager questions. This indifference told on the nerves of both the aunt and Nalini Devi. First they mumbled and then began complaining openly. The Mother, too, then said, 'See, I have so many sons; when they come, one can serve them with food on hands or on leaves as one wills; and they eat with joy. But should one of theirs come, what a number of cups and dishes one will have to bring out! And if you don't, there will be bitter complaints!' When the devotees finished eating, the Mother got up and gave betels to them, but she did not send any presents to her sons-in-law's houses, and from her mood it was evident that this decision was deliberate.

The astrologer of Vishnupur had prophesied that some successive issues of Maku would not meet each other. Some

seven or eight days before the birth of her second son, her first son Neda died at Jayrambati at five-thirty in the afternoon of April 20, 1919, after suffering from diphtheria for three days. The news was carried by Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj to the Holy Mother at Koalpara. At this she was beside herself with grief and cried as bitterly as any ordinary woman would. Not much later the time for offering food to the Master approached, and yet the Mother remained disconsolate. As a matter of duty, therefore, a devotee reminded her of the Master's worship. At once she was a changed person, as though nothing had happened. She offered the food duly. She did not cry for the whole night, though she talked about Neda and that with the greatest sorrow.

To feed and provide amply for the near and dear ones is a normal obligation of every householder; and society makes allowances for it though to cynics and pessimists such behaviour may appear as nothing better than sublimated selfishness. A man established in the knowledge of Brahman is equally cognizant of the illogicality of the situation. But unlike the cynic, he does not utter a single word of condemnation; on the contrary, he sympathizes with the householder in his struggle for the removal of a felt want, and he is ever ready to help him in his effort so far as it lies in his power. Such instances can be found in abundance in the life of the Mother.

Radhu was then ill at Koalpara. Uncle Kali and Brahmachari Varada were returning from their visit to the *tantrika* of Sushnegede to whom they had gone for getting some occult cure for Radhu. On the way the uncle said, 'Narayana Iyengar of Bangalore, who is a disciple of my sister, came here the other day and promised to dig a well on our land in front of sister's house. But now he is quite silent about it. He is a well-to-do man. If he digs the well it will benefit many. And as for the price of the land, is it so much after all? He can easily spare the money if he has a mind to. To be able to provide for sister's

drinking water — it's no small stroke of good fortune!' In other words the uncle wanted to exploit Sri Iyengar to get a few thousand rupees for a tiny plot of land. The uncle went on, 'Mind you, Varada, if sister saved all the money that she got as gifts, it would come to a good amount. But on the contrary she spends everything for her brothers and Radhi, she does not amass anything. Well, can you say to whom she gives most?' As Varada kept silent, the uncle changed his tone and said, 'Mind you, Varada, sister is honoured by people just because she has no passion for money. If she showed any interest in money such as ordinary people show, she would not command so much respect at all. It's just because of this that she is not human but divine — do you understand, Varada? Ah! You are all blessed! You have given up hearth and home at this early age and are running errands for sister day and night.' In the evening the Mother got a full report of the conversation from Varada and said smilingly, 'Kali is mad after money. "Food is a problem that makes fool of a wise man." He seems to consider his sister a money-yielding tree. But he has a little love and regard for me; in stress and strain it is Kali who stands by his sister. As for the others, the more you give, the merrier they are.'

Then came the day for the ceremony when Radhu's son would eat rice for the first time, and the Mother said to Varada, 'I have not got much in cash this time. To ask Kali to do the marketing means great expense. You purchase the more costly things after proper inquiry from Anur and Kotulpur. Later I shall get some of the smaller items purchased through Kali; otherwise he will fly into a rage.' The Mother then lived with her dependents and women devotees in a separate house.

Uncle Kali was a man of grave countenance and as such struck all with awe. Sisters Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Radhu's mother were all afraid of him. If the mad aunt became too turbulent, one had simply to say 'Call in Kali for a while,' and she would immediately take shelter

in her room. The Mother knew her brother too well to enrage him. Therefore, on the present occasion, uncle Kali had the sole responsibility for going to the market for purchases for the birthday celebration of the Mother. For some days earlier he went on inquiring about all kinds of odd things about the Mother's household. One day he said, 'Sister, from the number to which the inmates here in your house have swelled, methinks, you can no longer manage with a woman cook; there's need for a male cook. And your birthday is approaching, the gathering will be big, and marketing will have to be done on a good scale. Varada is young and can't manage it all.' The Mother replied, 'Look here Kali, I live in this house with a bevy of girls, how can I keep a male cook among them here? As for these boys living with me, you may consider them rather as my daughters than sons. As regards the devotees, they will be there to be sure, and so the purchasing has to be done carefully.' In the evening the Mother said, 'Look here, the Kotulpur purchases will have to be done through Kali this time. He has been running after that job for some days. If I don't give him a loose rein now and then, he may fly into a rage and create a situation.'

It should be remarked in passing that at this time the Mother had to depend for some of her cooking on non-brahmins. The two boys attending on her were not brahmins. Nonetheless, as the old brahmin woman engaged in the kitchen was not strong enough for the whole work at night, the two boys had to do much of it except for boiling rice etc., which they were not permitted to assist in. The Mother was afraid lest the villagers should find a loophole here and in collusion with the people elsewhere create trouble for her. She had to be cautious in dealing with them, though as a matter of fact uncle Kali and Radhu's husband Manmatha had often their night meal at this house. At last uncle Varada raised the question openly and gave the quietus to it by saying, 'As to that, sister, these Brahmacharis are your disciples — they are pure and

holy. Even rice would be holy if cooked by them. One has a repulsion in eating from any shop in Calcutta; it does not give one any satisfaction.' Uncles Varada and Prasanna were somewhat liberal in these matters, moreover, they were not cliquy; hence the Mother had not much to fear from them. About uncle Kali she had to be circumspect; and the hints he dropped about the kitchen made her wary.

Anyway, uncle Kali made all the purchases for the birthday celebration, the entire management of which rested with him. As a result he looked happy, and the Mother was free from anxiety. But in the afternoon she was sitting sadly on the verandah. They all had finished taking their food and were taking rest; but the Mother had no respite even then. On inquiry, Brahmachari Gopesh (Swami Saradeshanda) got the answer from her; 'My son, this wretch Kali is a constant source of trouble; he worries me without rime and reason. See, for instance, all have eaten, but I am waiting here with his food. He is delaying on one excuse or another; and I, too, can't take rest.' Uncle Kali wanted an absolutely free hand in the day's affair; but somewhere he must have been baffled, and he was now about to teach his sister a lesson. Gopesh understood the situation and hurried to uncle, whom he found busy heaping up hay on his farm-yard. Finding his face flushed and eyes red with anger, Gopesh dare not utter a word, but instead tried to help in the work. In a little while uncle's anger was cooled, and he said, 'Dear boy, why have you come here to take this trouble?' Gopesh got the opportunity he was seeking, and he explained, 'Mother is waiting for you with your food.' 'I never imagined', pleaded uncle, 'that sister was waiting with the food. Let's go.' The Mother was very glad to get him, and sat by him to serve and feed him calmly as though nothing had happened.

Another remarkable incident of the day may be recorded here. When all the monks were busy with the day's

work and merriment — worshipping, cooking, or singing — Gopesh found the Mother busy in her kitchen, arranging for some light diet for uncle Varada's wife who was then expecting a child and was in bad health, but had no other woman in the house to look after her. And, therefore, the Mother had to take care of her, though she lived in a separate house at some distance. The Mother was today the centre of the day's festivity; yet oblivious of the honour, shown to her by others, she thought it her first duty to look after the comfort of her ailing sister-in-law. Accordingly, she quietly dressed the articles for the food, washed them in the pond, cooked them and carried to the patient's house, without any fluster or any sign of dislike in her face.

A few weeks later, and a little while before the birthday of the Master, uncle Kali said, 'Sister, as you are here this time, we shall have to celebrate Paramahansa Mahashaya's (Master's) birthday on a befitting scale. Since you are here many relatives and other people will come to meet you.' The Mother was to start for Calcutta soon after the birthday; and uncle, therefore, talked of many visitors coming to bid her farewell. The Mother replied, 'Brother, where have I the kind of devotion that you have, and where's that capacity to celebrate the Master's birthday on a grand scale after my heart? Manage it somehow with potatoes, pumpkins, and such things as are available in this village. You can well see the state of my health; I am getting weaker day by day.' That was enough, uncle girded up his loins, and on the celebration day he was full of energy and enthusiasm, feeding people to his heart's content till dusk.

Not long after the quarrel between the two brothers we referred to in the beginning of the chapter, uncle Kali strengthened the fence round his farm-yard, made it tidy with a coating of cow-dung, and sat happily on the porch near his sister. In front of the Mother's house were being carried some bags of paddy to uncle Prasanna's barn. When they were a little way off, uncle Kali said in a low

voice, 'For how long have not those two stones (in front) been lying there! They have not been fixed on sister's birth-place. How joyous it will be if with Sarat Maharaj's (Swami Saradananda's) consent that plot of land is purchased in sister's name and a temple is put on it during our lifetime!' Those stones had been brought some time ago by the devotees of Ranchi for marking the birth-place of the Mother; but they had not been placed in position as the uncle could not be made to agree. Turning to the Mother, uncle Kali went on, 'As for my share, sister, I, can transfer it now and here, and the rest you take care of. Sarat Maharaj will pay me as he thinks best. It's my heart's desire that something is done about it right away.' We have to explain here that the portion of the plot of land that belonged to uncle Kali could not be utilized by him in any way, while the two other brothers put their land to use jointly. The Mother listened to him without much comment. In the evening she said to Brahmachari Varada, 'Listen Varada, in your today's letter to Sarat you write everything that Kali says now. When good sense has dawned on Kali, it strikes me, there should be no more delay. Prasanna is in Calcutta; Varada too will not refuse. It was Kali who raised objections at every step. As he mentions the matter of his own accord, it can be taken for granted that it will now be done. Didn't you see, how hard Narayana Iyengar begged to be allowed to dig a well (there) and yet he would not agree on any condition?' In those days Brahmachari Varada, under Saradananda's instruction, wrote daily to the latter informing him of the Mother's condition. Now he appraised the Swami of the new development. Next day the Mother told uncle, 'Varada wrote to Sarat reporting everything you told me yesterday.' 'But, sister', uncle corrected her then and there, 'I shall have to be paid something over and above the price that may be agreed upon. My family is large, and my income is small.' 'As for that,' interceded the Mother, 'won't they also demand more if they get any

inkling of it?' Needless to say that as a matter of fact all the uncles demanded and received something in addition to their individual share of the money. Swami Saradananda, who did not want to let the opportunity slip, finalized the deal and had the document registered without caring for the cost. Sri Narayana Iyengar had proposed to sink a well in a corner of this land. This was begun in summer after the Mother left for Calcutta.

Sometime at the end of September 1918, uncle Prasanna had to leave for Calcutta in connection with his priestly duties there, and to the Mother he said, 'Sister, you have come here now and I have to go to Calcutta. The family is here left behind; do look after them a little. What more can I add? Kali will have the best of it now. He is having a happy time of it, living on his own farm in the midst of his family at home, and you too are here; whereas I have to wander about even in this old age.' As some of these words reached uncle Kali's ears he turned up and began criticizing his brother saying, 'He is whining before sister for extorting money.' Uncle Prasanna, retorted, 'Look here, Kali, whether you have any respect for me or not, know this for certain, that I come just after sister, and you after me. Where's your devotion for sister? you know far less than I do of sister; you care only for her money.' The Mother laughed as she heard it all, and she remarked, 'My brothers are jewels indeed! It's because they had in their previous lives made penances to the extent of beheading themselves that I have been staying in their family.' The Mother did not, of course, depend on them at that time. She had her own house and establishment, and it was the brothers who looked to her for help.

Uncle Prasanna lived mostly in Calcutta; and his income from priesthood was not negligible. Yet he was miserly and calculating perhaps as a result of the poverty of his boyhood days. When his daughter Kamala was two years old, the Mother was at Jayrambati; he himself was

in Calcutta. The girl has fever with some complications. There was need for better treatment, but uncle Prasanna could neither come nor send money. He might have thought that since his sister was there, she would take proper care of the girl. But the Mother could not tolerate this undue dependence, and when she got the news, she said in disgust, 'He will have children every year, and yet why forsooth should he be spending money if any falls sick?' And she became so grave that nobody dared raise the topic again. Fortunately, Kamala recovered through the medicines she had been taking.

The Mother had then dealings with her relatives on three levels—the first the brothers, the second the sisters-in-law and the nieces, and the third the nephews and the sons of her nieces. The difference of age among them was great. The brothers had personal incomes, and yet expected their sister's assistance. Three of her nieces Nalini, Maku, and Radhu and Rahu's mother Surabala had become members of her family for various reasons. And on the third level were the little guideless children. The Mother's dealings on all these levels were adjusted according to the age of her relatives. We have studied her relationship with her brothers. Now we shall learn something of her love and affection towards the other two groups. We shall come to see that though she fulfilled her self-chosen duty towards the grown up people without flinching even under provocation, her mother's heart had its softest, warmest, and most charming expression for these unsophisticated little children.

Uncle Prasanna married Suvasini Devi a year after the death of his first wife Rampriya. Suvasini was then a mere girl and very young as compared with her sisters-in-law. Uncle Kali's wife Subodhabala Devi, Varadaprasad's wife Indumati Devi, and Abhaycharan's wife Surabala Devi, too, were much younger than the Mother. We are acquainted with Surabala well enough, though more of her remains yet to be told. We need not refer to her daughter

Radhu in this chapter. We have come across Nalini and Maku, both daughters of Rampriya Devi, but we have not known them thoroughly enough. About Kamala and Vimala, daughters of Suvasini Devi, we have not much to say. But we shall have to add some words about Subodhbala's son Bhudev, Indumati's son Kshudiram, Maku's son Neda, and Radhu's son Banu. Nalini and Maku were married before Radhu. Nalini Devi could not live with her husband owing to his poverty and the bad treatment she received in the family; and so she lived with the Holy Mother from the time of her mother's death. Maku, though married in a landholders' family at Tajpur, lived with the Holy Mother for various reasons—she seldom went to her father-in-law's house; and her husband Pramatha was often found in the Mother's entourage, as also was Radhu's husband Manmatha.

The Mother had a natural softness for Nalini Devi, deprived as she was of the love of her husband's house; and, therefore, she kept this niece with herself, putting up with all her shortcomings. One night, when all were asleep, Nalini's husband Pramatha arrived from his home at Goghat with a bullock-cart to take his wife home. But she was so afraid of going there that she bolted her door and threatened to commit suicide. The Mother entreated her to come out, but to no effect; and then only when the Mother assured her that she would not be sent, did she come out of her room. The Mother had been all along sitting at Nalini's door with a lighted lantern by her side. When Nalini came out, it was dawn. So the Mother put off the light and repeated the holy names, as was her wont in the morning; 'Ganga, Gita, Gayatri; Bhagavata, Devotee, Deity; Master, Master.' Later she said in course of a talk, 'She (Nalini) has got a trace of her aunt's quality, my boy, and that's why she doesn't want to go.'

Nalini suffered from a craze for purity, which was something like a mania and irritated many. She used to say, 'If aunt (Mother) happens to tread on leaves on which

people had eaten their food, she simply washes her feet and walks into the room; she doesn't even wash her clothes. If on any day she says, "Nalini, give me a little Ganges water", I shall think that she has touched faeces.' Such was her suspicious mind. One winter evening she told the Mother with tears in her eyes that she had touched something impure. Now, she could not bathe in the cold night; and she could neither enter her room nor eat anything without bathing; and consequently she would have to stand out in the cold with bare body for the whole night. 'Why did such a thing happen?' she complained, and she burst into tears. The Mother consoled her, argued with her, but to no avail. 'There's none in this world', wailed Nalini, 'whom I can call my own; my father has married a second time, and he does not so much as look at me; in my husband's house, too, there are enemies', and so on. When the meal-time came she was whining in the same strain. In disgust the inmates planned to teach her a lesson that night — let her stay out the whole night. All went to bed, but before doing so they requested the Mother not to be soft. Yet, at midnight there was the sound of opening of the Mother's door. She came out and called tenderly, 'Nalini, dear daughter Nalini, get up my dear, go to your room. Why do you suffer in the cold outside?' But Nalini made no response. The Mother went on in a mood of soliloquy, 'Ah! Nalini is a child, a little lacking in wisdom, she can't understand and so she flies into a temper and suffers, and others become disgusted with her.' At last the Mother won; Nalini Devi went to her own room to sleep.

Nalini Devi's mind was full of the prejudices common to villagers. At one time some Domes (untouchables) brought some straw loops used as seats for round-bottomed vessels. The Mother said, 'Keep them there.' With great care they deposited the things at the place indicated. Yet Nalini shrieked out, 'There they have touched everything; throw these away.' And she went on reviling them

saying, 'Though you are Domes, how dare you keep things in such a fashion?' The Domes feared they had committed a grievous sin. But the Mother consoled them saying, 'You need not fear, nothing will happen to you.' And she gave them some fried-rice to eat.

There was no love lost between the mad aunt and Nalini; they were always at daggers drawn. Still they belonged to the same family; and the Mother had assumed the task of making them live together. She used to say, 'Whatever you may do, you have, as a matter of fact, to give everybody due attention and consult his opinion. You have to grant a little freedom and watch from a distance so that nothing may go very wrong. Thus, for instance, while I am sending these presents to Radhu's house (at Tajpur) I take counsel from Nalini also. The relation between her and my youngest sister-in-law is that of the snake and the mongoose — the one does not see anything good in the other; and the other does not so much as tread on her shadow. But when I make Nalini my guide and say, "See, Nalini, what things you like; select from these and tell me", then she says with regard to the list I make, 'How can these things suffice, aunt? Howsoever they may deal with you — and as for Radhi, she is as good as mad, having no sense at all — you have surely some dignity; why should you be so illiberal? You do just as it befits you.'" She speaks thus and makes the list longer. I, too, laugh inwardly. If I should send the present there without letting her know the two will at once begin to fight a battle of Kurukshetra over that matter. Mind you, one has to give some freedom to each and lower oneself a little. When dealing with these conceited persons, I have to study their moods and move ^{she} ~~she~~ ^{fy} cautiously; and yet they fall out now and then — as though it's their nature! How can I help that? I think to myself, "It's His world, He is taking care of it."'

The Mother assumed responsibility for Maku also; for her sake she had to keep in good humour the people at her

husband's house; and she used to say, 'If they are not very properly taken care of, they get offended at the slightest thing.' Maku was only slightly older than Radhu. When the Mother lived with Radhu at Koalpara in 1919, Nalini, in her envy, thought that the Mother was spending money unnecessarily on Radhu, while she was neglecting Maku who was in a very advanced state of pregnancy. Nalini at first said, 'Aunt' why are you so worried? Nothing is the matter with Radhu.' Then she wrangled with the mad aunt in season and out of season. And she advised Maku that it would be much better for her to go away to Jayrambati than to court neglect at Koalpara. Not only that, she had a palanquin brought and she left for Jayrambati with Maku and her son, without so much as consulting the Mother about this move. The Mother was then taking rest after her midday meal; from her bed she heard Nalini shouting to her younger sister, 'Maku, so you keep standing still! Come away quick.' Mortified by this unseemly conduct, the Mother said to Brahmachari Varada, 'She (Maku) did not so much as bring her son (Neda) to salute me when departing. It shall be as they have in store; what else can I do, my dear? But, for you there's this additional task of shuttling between the two places; unless you go every day to inquire about them, the anger will be heightened all the more.'

The Mother wanted and got news every day. When Neda fell ill, she arranged for his treatment. But the boy died after an illness of three days. These facts have already been stated. The Mother was getting ready to go to Jayrambati; but she had not had sufficient time to do so. She cried bitterly at the boy's death, so dear was he to her. That night she could not relish food; but when she knew that others could not take anything unless she did so, she drank a little milk and ate a few *luchis*. Her sorrow was in evidence the next day also; nay, even long after this, her eyes became wet and her voice choked as she talked of this boy. After his death she said, 'The boy must have been

some spiritual aspirant who died in an earlier life before attainment of salvation, or he might have been some holy man. He had a little (of worldliness) left; that much is over — this is his last birth. One cannot find so many good tendencies in a boy of his age. From somewhere he brought *gulan* flowers every day to worship my feet. He called Sarat (Swami Saradananda) “red uncle”. He could not read or write, being barely two and a half or three years of age. Yet in imitation of Sarat, he sat with a broken wooden box in front and every day wrote (on it) letters to Sarat; and he said by word of mouth whatever news of this place he was sending.’ When on the evening of the day following Neda’s death, Manindra Babu and Prabhakar Babu of Arambagh came to take leave of the Mother, she said with tearful eyes, ‘He (Neda) asked, “Who made the flowers red?” I replied, “The Master has done so.” “Why?” “Because he will put them on.”’ Noticing her eyes wet even eight or ten days after the boy’s death, one devotee asked, ‘I think, you too now realize the sorrow that worldly people have when they lose their children?’ the Mother replied, ‘Does it require to be told? I can’t free myself from the grief that I suffer because of having nurtured Maku’s son.’

We turn to a much earlier incident. Neda was then a child of one year. In the morning the Mother was arranging some fruits and other articles to be offered to the Master, when Neda crawled forward to snatch away one of the peeled plantains. The Mother said tenderly, ‘Tarry a little, my child, you will get it after it has been offered to the Master.’ As the boy did not stop, the Mother pushed him back a little with her hand; but he still pushed forward in the direction of the fruit. The Mother’s attendant now volunteered to carry him away. But she prevented him, put a plantain in Neda’s mouth, and said, ‘Eat, my Gopala, eat.’ There was then a divine softness in her voice and a transcendental light in her eyes and face.¹

1. It is sacriligious to make a present of things meant for God before the worship. The Mother never did so with regard to the articles brought for the

The Mother recollected that Neda called her Sita. She had then lost her teeth, and Neda sat on the steps of a house, dangling his legs and saying 'Take two of my teeth.'

Radhu's son was born in the jungle (*vana*) of Koalpara. Therefore the Mother named him Vanabihari or in short Banu. In the morning, while waking up Banu, she sang just as mother Kausalya would have done when rousing her son Ramachandra:

It's morning; get up my child, thou that art merciful to gods, men,
and saints.

Do thou bathe and offer as gifts, cattle, elephants, gold, and betel-
nuts.

Indumati Devi's eldest son was Kshudiram or Kshudi in short; but as that was also the name of the Master's father; and according to custom, a daughter-in-law may not utter such a name out of respect for him, she pronounced the name as Fudi. As Kshudi loved fruits, the Mother sent these for him in parcels from Calcutta. While at home, she would mix together milk and rice after her meal and wait for the boy who knew of this and turned up in time. Finding him, the Mother would say tenderly, 'Come, my child, I have been calling you.' Kshudi's mother complained, 'It's not good to feed him with so many good things; being a poor man's son, where can he find such things for ever.' The Mother silenced her saying, 'You know nothing, my dear, "He that lives high is helped to do so by the Most High."' The Mother was to start for Calcutta and Kshudi clamoured to accompany her. To pacify the child, she presented him a gold ring she had from Shambhu Roy's wife, and a lump of candy, telling him to take a bite at it whenever he missed her. When Kshudi went to Calcutta with his mother, the

Master. If any emergency arose, she would cook separately, or to pacify importunate children she would give them after a mental offering to the Master. Gopala here means the Lord in His form as a child.

Mother asked the boy affectionately what kind of anklets he would like to have. And Kshudi told her that he liked to have tinkling ones. The Mother said, 'That's good, my child. Gopala has tinkling anklets; you too shall have the same.' She got them made for him. One day she asked the boy, 'What curry had you, my child, with your rice?' He stretched both his hands to show the size of a huge cat fish (*magur*) which his mother had bought. The Mother again asked him, 'Did she give it to you?' The boy complained, 'She gave me only one piece, aunt—she gave away to all others.' The Mother said with a smile, 'Let Indu come, I shall straighten it out with her.' As soon as Indumati Devi turned up in the afternoon, the Mother said, 'Can you imagine? You bought such a big *magur* fish and cooked it; but you gave only one piece to Fudi, and nothing more!' Indumati explained that they had not purchased any fish whatsoever. The Mother laughed and said, 'Hello, dear; my brother Umesh used to talk like that. And Fudi does it so today.' Noticing the devotees worshipping the lotus feet of the Mother, Kshudi placed one tiny hand on her feet, and went on offering handfuls of flowers with the other. The Mother drew him to her lap and said, 'My child, you are all born free. There's no need of flowers any more.'

Indumati Devi fell seriously ill after the birth of her second son Vijay. The Mother called in doctors from various places, and she herself worked so strenuously that she fell ill. After recovery she said to Indumati, 'When a son is born to you, I suffer more than you do, under the apprehension that if anything happens to you, then it's I that shall have to take care (of the child). I can't certainly neglect it.' And she pronounced a queer benediction: 'I bless you so that you may not have any more male issue.' As Indumati Devi began to suffer from the time of Vijay's birth, the Mother named him Dukhiram (sorrowful Rama). But Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma protested, 'His lot will be cast in accordance with the name you give. Even as it is,

how he is suffering!' Then she changed the name to Vijay.

On the eve of the Jagad-dhatri worship, Vimala, younger daughter of Suvasini Devi had fever with swelling of feet which rendered her unconscious. Dr. Vaikuntha Maharaj after administering medicine told the Mother, 'I gave a dose of medicine just because you asked me to do so. It flowed out, for she has no pulse.' The Mother went to that house on hearing this, and Suvasini grasped her feet, wailed piteously, and taking the dust of those blessed feet mixed it with water to put into Vimala's lips. The Mother passed her hand over the girl's body and then coming to the image of the goddess prayed with folded hands, 'Mother, there will be Your worship tomorrow. Is it Thy will that my eldest sister-in-law shall be mourning then?' Vimala recovered consciousness the same night.

At the time of marriage, Bhudev was thirteen years old; and his wife a little girl. Noticing Subodhbala Devi, mother-in-law of the girl, chiding her, the Mother said jokingly, 'I say, my younger sister-in-law, be quiet, be quiet! "Has the new girl just dropped from nowhere? How much of tomtoming had there been at her marriage how many drums beaten and pipes blown!"' Then with a solemn voice she added 'Why do you scold her? How dear is this daughter-in-law of ours!'

The Mother had reason to laugh at the severe attitude of Subodhbala Devi. When these sisters-in-law came to their husbands, they were inexperienced little girls, and the Mother, as the *de facto* guardian of the whole family, took in hand their training and brought them up lovingly and patiently in spite of their shortcomings. With them she maintained for ever this relation of affection.

Indumati Devi and sister Nalini were then young and did not know how to cook; hence the Mother used to tell them, 'Come to me and learn to cook. Shall I be cooking at your house for ever?' In later years, when Indumati became a perfect mistress of her household, the Mother

had her own separate establishment. She then used to ask Indumati to cook some simple curries which the Master liked most, with figs and greens like *Gima* (*mollugo cerviana*), *Amrul* (*oxalis corniculata*), etc., and said encouragingly, 'You cook the fig curry very nicely.' Once, when Indumati had some digestive trouble, the Mother advised her, 'Look here! Do some *japa* and meditation and then the physical ailment will disappear.' And on another occasion she warned her, 'Look here! You are all very inexperienced; you should do your duties carefully. My Master is very vigilant; if you are careless, you will incur sin.'

On the occasion of the worship of the goddess Manasa, the mother of Balaram Banerji of Jayrambati fed the devotees sumptuously; and hence on returning home no one felt inclined to cook. Nalini, the cook, said, 'We all can manage with a tin of fried-rice, instead of setting out to cook now.' Nevertheless, Suvasini Devi cooked four pounds of rice; and all had their full meals. Next day, the Mother, when engaged in dressing vegetables with others, remarked, 'Nalini forbade cooking; but sister-in-law did it; that saved a tin of fried-rice. Otherwise we would have to call in Mrigendra's mother again today, though she had made the fried-rice for us yesterday. "Blessed is she that understands, no matter whether she's senior or junior."'

Once when the Mother was staying at Kamarpukur for a fortnight, Suvasini Devi happened to send some lotuses and some sweets for her, on receiving which the Mother remarked, 'No one sends me any present in this family—only this one does.' Suvasini was an initiated disciple of the Mother. One day, when old papers were being cleared, a bundle of currency notes, worth fifty or sixty rupees, was thrown out by mistake. When Suvasini found it and brought it to the Mother, the latter said kissing her by touching her chin, 'Gaur-dasi (Gauri-Ma) made this one mine, for Gaur-dasi is very clever.' The Mother at first was against initiating a sister-in-law, saying 'I shan't

impart any *mantra* to persons within the family.' But Gauri-Ma argued, 'How is that so, Mother? Let there be at least one whom you can call your own.' So Suvasini got her initiation. Subsequently, Maku Bhudev and his wife, and Radhu and her husband had initiation.

The Mother was full of praise for anything presented to her by her dear ones. Suvasini Devi once prepared a certain kind of tooth-powder which she knew the Mother liked. She then sent it through her husband to the Mother in Calcutta. The Mother remembered this till her return to Jayrambati when she said to Suvasini, 'The tooth-powder that you sent was highly appreciated by all.' Suvasini regretted before the Mother that though she had taken the *mantra*, she was not having adequate practice. At this the Mother said, 'This work that you are doing is itself a practice—what other practice should there be? Pray to the Master that he may grant you devotion.'

The world has its happiness and sorrow, its ups and downs. In spite of them all the Mother tried to make life joyous for all and to live with all in an atmosphere of cordiality. But there were opposing forces which set at nought all her good intentions. The selfishness of the brothers, the mutual jealousy of the nieces, Nalini's mania for purity, the perversity of Radhu, and the insanity of Radhu's mother—all these combined to produce an intolerable atmosphere in which it was possible for Mother to carry on her self-chosen duty without demur only because of her matchless, patient and forgiving nature. The Mother's domestic life is made up of all this. We have almost come to the end of this sad chapter but for a few words to be added about the mad aunt.

In the beginning of February 1907, Surabala Devi went to her father's house with her box of ornaments. The greedy father annexed the box from his daughter, and this made the aunt all the more unbalanced. One day she went to the shrine of the goddess Simhavahini and bemoaned in this strain; 'Mother, give me my ornaments,

give me my ornaments.' The Mother was then sitting in her own house and talking with another devotee who heard nothing of the cry of Surabala. Indeed, there was no reason why he should from that distance. But the Mother heard her cries and said, 'I am going, I am going. My boy, she has none other than myself. The mad one is crying before Simhavahini for her ornaments.' And she left for the temple. The mad aunt came away with her; but then she changed the burden of her complaint and charged the Mother saying, 'Sister-in-law, it is you who are holding back my ornaments, and it is you who are not returning them.' The Mother replied, 'If I had them I should throw away the trash.' And turning to the devotee she said, 'Girish used to say that she is the mad companion that has come with me.' Some days after this, the Mother sent a devotee with an old servant of the house either to bring Surabala's father or the ornaments. The brahmin came, but not with the ornaments. The Mother implored the old man by taking hold of his feet, 'Kindly save me from this difficulty.' But the covetous old man was obdurate. As a last resort the Mother communicated the whole matter to Calcutta, in response to which Master Mahashaya and Lalit Chatterji, nicknamed Kaiser, came in a few days. Lalit Babu was armed with a letter from a high police officer of Calcutta, with the help of which he got a few constables from Badanganj police station. With this posse of policemen following him, and himself sitting in a palanquin in a full European suit, as though he were a police officer, he proceeded to the old brahmin's house on the day succeeding the Sivaratri festival. But the move raised misgivings in the Mother's mind, lest Lalit Chatterji through his youthful indiscretion should dishonour the brahmin. And so she sent Master Mahashaya also after him. They returned with the brahmin and the ornaments before dusk, and the brahmin handed over the box. The incident ended there; but at 2 a.m. at night the news came to the outer apartment that the Mother was

passing a wholly sleepless night, and that her head was reeling. On being questioned about the cause of this discomfort, she explained, 'On the one hand they all went out in quest of the ornaments, and on the other I kept on thinking the whole day, lest the brahmin should be insulted in any way. This made me nervous; and hence this condition.'

In February 1913, when the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' in Calcutta, Surabala concluded that the Mother kept Radhu under her control through the power of drugs, and yet she was spending all she had without making provision for the girl. Surabala's mind was, therefore, very much exercised about Radhu's future; and she abused the Mother. One night the Mother became disgusted at such foul language and said sternly, 'Don't you consider me an ordinary mortal. I don't take any offence, though you revile me so much, casting slur on my father and mother, just because I think that these are mere words. Do you think you can have any escape if I am really offended? It's all to your advantage so long as I live. Your daughter will be yours only. I shall be there so long only as she is not properly brought up. Otherwise what attachment have I? I can rend all ties asunder this very moment. You won't so much as have an inkling of my disappearing some day like camphor.' The mad aunt now became a changed person, and explained, 'When did I abuse you, casting slur on your father? I never did such a thing, I made just a simple statement. The trouble is, when you give, you give away without reserve.'

During the Mother's last stay at Jayrambati, her health became very bad and her body weak and emaciated. She hardly had any domestic peace. There was trouble from Radhu who continued to crawl about for six months after child-birth. And over and above all these there was the mad, cross-grained Surabala who was rather quarrelsome. One day she imagined that her son-in-law Manmatha had been drowned. She explored every

corner for him, but could find him nowhere. At last she got into a tank and searched for him there also. Suddenly it flashed in her mind, 'All this is the work of sister-in-law.' She hurried to the Mother at once with wet cloth and cried saying, 'O dear sister-in-law, my son-in-law has been drowned in the Badujye tank. What's to be done now?' In great consternation the Mother called in everybody. One of them said on hearing the whole story, 'I saw Manmatha playing cards in the grocer's shop.' 'Run,' said the Mother, 'and bring him here.' Manmatha came immediately, and the mad aunt retired abusing the Mother nevertheless.

What followed is extremely sad to contemplate. Mother quite lost her patience. She was perhaps preparing for the final departure, and before her earthly play was over she wanted to take back with her the mad companion also.

On the evening of the above-mentioned incident the Mother was dressing vegetables for the night, when the cranky and cantankerous Surabala burst in upon her with the charge: 'It's you who have been administering opium to Radhu with a view to crippling her and keeping her under your thumb.' Whether the devotees believed it or not, the Mother was then really eager to free herself from all bonds, however self-chosen they might have been. And hence with the greatest unconcern she said, 'Why don't you take away your daughter? There she lies. Have I kept her concealed?' The mad aunt did not want facts or reason; she was on the war path. This apathetic and calm response of the Mother stirred her mettle. She started abusing violently and her pugnacity blazed up by stages, until at last she was grill red with anger. Then taking in hand a piece of fuel, she tried to strike the Mother on the head. Frightened by that terrible sight, the Mother shrieked out helplessly, 'Hello, who is there, the mad woman is killing me.' Brahmachari Varada ran in to find the log about to fall on the head. He snatched it

away in the twinkling of an eye, drove the crazy woman out of the main gate, and shaking with anger forbade her to enter those precincts again. When he returned to the Mother, he found her still in a ruffled mood in the midst of which these words shot out of her lips: 'Mad woman, what were you about to do? That hand of yours will fall off from your body.' And just as she had uttered these in a state of fury, she regained her own innate composure and biting her tongue as a sign of remorse for an unintentional lapse, she looked at the Master's picture with folded hands and said penitently, 'Master, what's this that I have done? What's the remedy now? Hitherto no curse against anybody had ever escaped my lips; and yet that, too, comes to pass at last! Why tarry longer then?' She was weeping then. That compassion and self-reproach kept Varada spell-bound and his own anger melted away.

The mad aunt was attacked with leprosy not long after the passing away of the Mother, as a result of which she lost her fingers. However, she had not to suffer much. She passed away not long after to repair to her own place at the lotus feet of the Holy Mother.

A GUIDING FORCE

The Mother visited Bodh Gaya at the end of March 1890. On that occasion the contrast between the wealth of the monastery there on the one hand, and on the other the absence of any permanent residence, the indescribable want of food and raiment, and the hard physical labour for running the monastery on the part of her world-renouncing sons, moved very much the Mother of the Order. She said subsequently, 'Ah! For this, how I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only then, through his grace has come into existence today the Math (monastery). When the Master left his body, the boys gave up the world and gathered together round a (rented) shelter for some days. Then they scattered about independently and went on roaming about here and there. Then I felt intensely sad and prayed thus to the Master, "Master, you came, played and disported with these few and then went away; and should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for coming down in the midst of so much sorrow. I have seen in Banaras and Vrindaban many holy men who get their food by begging and shifting their 'residence' from the shadow of one tree to that of another. There's no dearth of holy men of that type. I shan't be able to bear the sight of my sons, who come out in your name, going about begging for food. My prayer is, that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about." After that, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) began gradually building up all this.'

Every sentence here reveals her infinite motherly love and solicitude for the Order, her firm grasp of and convic-

tion about the uniqueness of the Master's message and its future possibilities and her earnestness for having a permanent habitation for her children. These hopes and desires were not mere idle fancies of her mind; as long as she was on this earth, she did her utmost to see the Order well established and ably managed. Love, according to her, was the life-force of the Order. As every member thereof looked up to her for her benign blessing, so also she wanted each of its units to be tied to others by the bond of affection, so that a solid brotherhood might emerge defying all disruptive tendencies. The head of the Koalpara Ashrama expected work from the Brahmacharis under him; but in return he showed neither active love for them, nor concern for their welfare; and there was no proper arrangement for their food and clothing. The result was that many left the Ashrama to live with the Mother or with Swami Saradananda. Still the head did not mend his ways; on the contrary he approached the Mother in a mood of wounded justice and said, 'Mother, formerly they were all very obedient; now they have their eyes opened, they are not always willing to continue under my control. Besides, if they go either to Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) or yourself, you keep them with love and care, and they get advantage of better food. If you don't keep them, but explain things to them and send them back to me, then they will be obedient to me.' Amazed at such a talk, the Holy Mother, love incarnate as she was, said, 'How is that so? What's all this you are talking about? Love is our forte. It's through love that the Master's family has taken shape. And I am a mother; how could you talk to me twittingly about the food and clothing of my sons?'

The head of the Ashrama did not take adequate care of even the health of the inmates, though they suffered from malaria. When the Mother came to know of this, she had nourishing food arranged for them. She also expressed her disapproval of the authoritarianism of the

head by saying, 'How so, my boy? If you go on exercising authority in this way with diplomacy at the back of your mind, how can the Ashrama go on? May be, the boys are all your pupils, yet even if one scolds one's own son, excess of it results in separation.'

The Mother had the greatest affection for the head, and he too was profoundly devoted to her; but that was no reason why she should wink at callousness. When the Mother was at the Koalpara Ashrama with Radhu, the head informed the Mother one day that the Brahmacharis did not want to stay there, and that they had left for other places, and so the Mother should make it impossible for them to find shelter anywhere else and thus compel them to stay at Koalpara to serve the Mother. This suggestion enraged her and she said, 'What would you have me say to them? Do you expect me to tell them that they shall not find quarters anywhere? They are my sons, and have come to the Master; the Master will look after them wherever they may be. And you would have me say that they shall be refused accommodation everywhere. I shall never say that.' All became awed at the Mother's flushed face and loud voice. The devoted head at once fell at her feet and begged for mercy.

Though the Mother corrected the head when the need arose, she also advised the inmates to be disciplined and forbearing. A few days earlier than the incident related above, she said to a Brahmachari, 'Look here, every one has to be accommodating. The Master used to say, "*sha, sha, sa*"¹. Forbear everything. He is there to judge.' In spite of the numerous inconveniences of a corporate life, she advised the monks to live unitedly in the Ashramas and such other places and work there.

Swamis Vishuddhananda, Shantananda, and Girijananda left home through extreme dislike for the world and

1. In colloquial Bengali *Sa* (*saha*) means forbear; and in the Bengali alphabet there are three 's' sounds (sibilants), as shown above. Punning on these letters, the Master emphasizes thrice the need of forbearance.

walked from Calcutta to Jayrambati. They, and particularly Swami Vishuddhananda, wished with the Mother's blessing to become itinerant monks, spending the rest of their lives outside Ashramas in austerity at holy places. The Mother welcomed them affectionately, heard them attentively, and fed them with tender care. Next morning she said, 'Shave your heads today and have your clothes coloured with ochre; I shall sanction your Sannyasa (formal renunciation) tomorrow.' Next day (July 29, 1907) she handed over to each of them his ochre garment and prayed to the Master, 'Master, protect their (vow of) renunciation. Wherever they may be—on hills or mountains, in forests or wildernesses—grant them their little sustenance.' But she did not at all like the idea of their itineration: and hence on the eve of bidding farewell to them she said, 'There's no need for you to undergo such hardship. But since you have resolved to be wandering monks, I grant you this much as a last resort—you walk up to Banaras. There I am writing to Tarak (Swami Shivananda); he will accommodate you. Live with him to build up your life of monasticism. Also take your monastic names from him.' Accordingly, they started for Banaras. The Mother accompanied them to the border of the village and there bade adieu with tearful eyes. When they reached Banaras, Swami Shivananda did as he was directed.

We now come to an event in April 1911, when a monk was staying at the 'Udbodhan' after committing a serious offence. Revered Swami Brahmananda and other aged monks wanted him to leave the 'Udbodhan' and go to the Belur Math. But he was loth to comply. About him Swami Saradananda one day submitted to the Mother, 'Should Maharaj's (Swami Brahmananda's) words, our words be totally ignored? Let him go to the Math for at least a couple of days just for the sake of respecting Maharaj's order.' A few days later the Mother alluded to this talk and said that she herself had advised him to go to

the Math, but with no result. About him she said regretfully, 'To be sure, it concerns a superior's command! The truth is, he has no mind to work. Does the mind remain healthy if one doesn't? Is it possible to do *japa* and meditation all the twenty-four hours? One should have some other useful engagement. That will keep the mind well.' But though she tried in vain to change the monk's mind, she never showed any the less affection for him.

A year after this, a son of hers represented that according to some it was not befitting a monk's life to run hospitals, sell books, keep accounts, etc.; that the Master had done no such thing; that if anyone was in need of engagements one should have recourse to such practices as worship, *japa*, meditation, and singing the Lord's name, as all other works would deflect the mind from God. Having heard it all through, the Mother said finally, 'If you don't work, with what will you occupy yourself day and night? Is it possible to meditate and make *japa* all the twenty-four hours? They refer to the Master! He is an exception, and Mathur supplied him his dainty dishes. You get your food just because you have engaged yourself in some work here. Otherwise would you not be moving from door to door for a morsel of rice? Everything shall go on as the Master ordains. The Math will run as it is doing now. Those who can't put up with this will clear out.'

During her stay at Banaras in 1912, the Mother remarked while visiting a widow's home managed by the local Ramakrishna Mission, 'By serving these helpless old women one serves Narayana (God) Himself. Ah! What a fine piece of work these boys are doing!' And about this same institution she said on another occasion, 'All this is His wish, my daughter! He knows best how He is getting His plan executed and through what.'

About *japa* and meditation she said one day at Jayrambati, 'How many can carry on *japa* and meditation all the time? It's much better to work, keeping the mind fixed and without letting it wander about. The mind creates

trouble whenever it is let loose. It's because Naren realized this that he started selfless work.'

The Mother had not a shadow of doubt that the Master would work out his new message through his Order. One day a certain head of a monastery regretted before the Mother that owing to the lack of practical public sympathy, the work was not progressing satisfactorily; for our countrymen knew only how to destroy and not how to build. To this the Mother replied with conviction, 'My son, the Master said, "When the southern breeze blows, all trees that have developed hard-wood get transformed into sandal." The southern breeze has blown; now all will be turned into sandal—except bamboos and bananas.'

Many problems of the Ashramas and their inmates either came to her notice or were placed before her by others, and in each case she gave advice and suggested remedies. To the charitable dispensary at Koalpara came many patients who had the means to purchase medicines elsewhere. Discovering this, the head of the centre approached the Mother with the request that she might sanction the discontinuance of such practice. But she stretched her vision beyond that of an ordinary mortal and said that any one who came to beg must be considered needy and as such should not be turned out. So the dispensary continued to be open to all.

Before this Ashrama was incorporated into the Ramakrishna Organization, the inmates of the institution had active sympathy for the Swadesi movement, which aimed at bringing the British government to its senses through boycott of foreign goods and patronage of home-made ones. The Mother noticed that their energy was being frittered away by mere talk, and so she said, 'Look here, don't you simply move about agitating and shouting "*Vande-mataram*" (Salutation to the mother country); have looms and weave cloth. I wish I had myself a spinning wheel. Do something constructive.' And we have mentioned elsewhere how with a view to basing the Ashrama

activities on spirituality, she installed there with her own hands the Master as the presiding Deity.

She was also eager to instil into the Brahmacharis of the Ashrama a thirst for knowledge. To those who served her she said one day, 'Mind you, many devotees will come from foreign lands: you master the English language.' For this work she first engaged Swami Dharmnanda and then Krishnabhusan Babu of Dacca.

She praised work; but then she was not blind to its evil consequences. Some monks start monasteries with the best of motives, but the contact with the world and worldly people often exerts a baneful influence over their minds and diverts them from the path of God. So the Mother said to Swami Tanmayananda, 'Should one jump out of a frying pan to enter into the fire! Instead of calling on the Lord after leaving the world one merely occupies oneself with work. An Ashrama is a second household. People leave home for the Ashrama; but they become so much attached that they don't want to leave an Ashrama.'

Another point to be noted in the Mother's life was a charming combination of maternal tenderness with non-attachment. With heart and soul she wished for the good of all her children. Once, at Jayrambati, at the time of the worship of Durga, when all had departed after offering flowers at her sacred feet at the most sacred moment of the juncture of the eighth and ninth days of the moon, the Mother said to a Brahmachari, 'Bring more flowers, and offer them on behalf of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarat, Khoka (Subodhananda), Yogen (Yogin-Ma), and Golap (Golap-Ma). Offer flowers in the names of all my known and unknown children.' Accepting the worship, she sat silently for a long time with folded hands before the Master and then prayed, 'Let all prosper, here and hereafter.' On another occasion during her birthday at the 'Udbodhan' in 1918, when all went away after adoring her with flowers, she called Brahmachari Varada to herself, blessed him by laying her hand on his head, and then directed him, 'Offer

flowers in the names of all at Jayrambati and Koalpara; for this is a special day.' When this was done, she prayed to the Master for the weal of all.

Only those with personal experience of that affection will realize how deep and rare it was and through what diverse channels it flowed. Brahmachari Jnan (Swami Jnanananda) suffered at Jayrambati from itches which became so pervasive and painful that he could not eat with his hand; and so the Mother mixed the rice and curries for him and put them morsel by morsel into his mouth. Brahmachari Rashbihari, while busy in connection with the work of the new house of the Mother at Jayrambati, had to go on an errand to a distant village from which he could not return in time for his noon-meal. It was winter when days were short. Returning only a few hours before sunset, he was taken aback to learn that the Mother waited for his return and would not sit for her meal. He remonstrated, 'Mother, your health is bad, yet why have you kept fasting till this hour?' The Mother replied, 'My son, how can I eat so long as you have not done so?' Rashbihari sat down for his food without further delay; and the Mother and other women, who had been waiting for her, sat only after he had finished. How many mothers are so very considerate for their own children?

Swami Vrajeshwarananda worked heart and soul at the Belur Math and was loved by the older monks. Once it struck him, 'Instead of gratifying my self-importance in this way by getting the indulgence of the old monks, it is better to go outside to undertake austerity.' But he knew that he would not get the approval of the Math authorities; and, therefore, he went to Calcutta to obtain the Mother's sanction. He bowed down before her and opened out his mind. The Mother wanted to know where he would go and whether he had any money with him. Vrajeshwarananda said that he was penniless and that he would walk up to Banaras along the Grand Trunk Road. The Mother then said with the tenderest tone. 'This is Kartika (October-

November), (when) people say that all the four doors of Yama (Death) are open. I am a mother; how can I say, "My son, you go"? Moreover, you say, you have nothing with you; who will feed you, my boy, when you are hungry?' Vrajeshwarananda abandoned his plan.

As misfortune would have it, someone was leaving the Order. As he came to bid farewell, the Mother began to weep and so also did the devotee. A little later she wiped her tears with the edge of her cloth and asked the devotee to wash his face in the bathroom. Then she said, 'Don't forget me. I know you won't; still I say so.' 'What about you, Mother?' asked the devotee. 'Can a mother forget?' replied the Mother, and she added, 'Believe me I shall ever be with you. Don't be afraid.' When the devotee got down on the road, the Mother kept on looking at him from the window till he could be seen no more.

Once the head of the Koalpara Ashrama commented that the boys moved from one monastery to another simply for the sake of good food. Alluding to this the Mother said, 'Notice what a queer remark it is! Why should my sons, the Master's sons, lack food? They shall not. I myself prayed to the Master, "O Master, may your sons never suffer for want of food." And he insinuates that they run about because of their greed!'

Brahmachari Rashbihari reached Jayrambati in 1907 with an extreme repulsion for the world in his heart and with a single piece of cloth round his person. On the way, it did of course occur to him that he should return home to get more clothes; but lest some hindrance should crop up, he preferred to move on without any spare clothes in hand. The Mother received him cordially, gave him another cloth which she asked him to take away when leaving Jayrambati, and she offered to pay him his return fare, which, however, he refused as he had no need of it. At the time of departure the Mother said, 'Write to me after reaching there;' and added sorrowfully, 'I could not feed my son properly.'

And yet what a number of people were granted Sannyasa, and were thus helped to leave home, by this very soft-hearted mother! True it is that she did not permit taking Sannyasa indiscriminately; her advice about marriage and celibacy varied according to circumstances. Reading the future of the inquirer with her divine eyes, she said to the monks at times, 'What a sad lot is that of householders! You'll now heave a sigh of relief and sleep soundly.' At other times she said to wavering bachelors, 'I can't venture any opinion about that. If you are unhappy after wedlock you'll say, "Mother, you consented to my marriage." Some devotee would say, "Mother, I won't marry." And to this the Mother might reply with a smile, "How is that? All things in the world are arranged in pairs. Look here, for instance, there are two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet—just so are husband and wife." That devotee got wedded. Some one else would say, "Mother I have no desire to marry; my parents want to make me do so per force." The Mother would reply at once, "See, see, what oppression!" Once a devotee said to her, "Mother, I have tried so long to remain a bachelor; now I see, I shan't be able to continue." The Mother said reassuringly, "Why be afraid? There were quite a number of householder devotees of the Master. You need not be afraid, you can wed.'

It was not easy to understand the Mother's mind in such situations; curiosity was, therefore, rampant. The widow of Navasan one day expostulated, 'Mother, all your sons are equal; and yet to one who seeks your opinion regarding marriage, you give your consent for it; and him who wants to leave the world, you advise approvingly eulogizing renunciation. It should rather be your duty to lead all along the path that is best.' The Mother answered, 'Will a man whose thirst for enjoyment is great obey me even if I prohibit it? And should I not help him a little who through his immense good luck has seen through this play of maya and clings to Him as the only reality?'

My daughter, is there any end to the woes of the world?'

Even if we take it for granted that one should assist a monk in the path of his renunciation, the question arises, 'Who can recognize such a passionless man, and after such recognition who can help him?' The Mother knew well enough that a layman cannot have the same outlook as a monk. We are not taking into consideration such persons as the widow of Navasan in whom affliction in life and devotion towards the Mother had generated a veneration for the ochre garb; we have here in mind people who have the clarity of vision and are willing to help souls that are free from attachment. How many are there of such a high calibre? When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time there came a young man who had obtained the M. A. degree. He said that he was in a dilemma. Understanding that he was desirous of the monastic life, Swami Shivananda of the Belur Math had encouraged him heartily; but considering the shock that his mother would get, Master Mahashaya had been advising delay.¹ The Mother listened without any commitment. Later she told Brahmachari Varada, 'He has his mother and brother at home, which is near Master's (Master Mahashaya's). Hearing that he wants to become a monk, Master is dilly-dallying and saying, "What harm is there if you don't take orders so hurriedly?" But at the Math, Tarak (Shivananda) is giving him much encouragement. After all, Master is a householder, and Tarak an unsophisticated holy man. Ah! To accept the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideal of renunciation is the result of great good fortune. Tarak has spoken rightly. How many can rise up if they once dive into the world? The boy has great strength of mind.' When the young man saluted her again the next day, she blessed him heartily and said, 'May your wish be

1. Though Master Mahashaya seemed to be a little reserved in this particular case, in actuality he inspired many to take to a life of renunciation.

fulfilled, my boy. What Tarak has said is absolutely true.'

Rammay was then quite young. He was reading for the B.A. degree. Everyone in the Mothers' household knew that he wanted to become a monk. One noon the Mother was cleaning her teeth with powder, while Rammay stood by her. Suddenly Nalini Devi said, 'Just see, dear aunt, how fine this boy is. He has passed two examinations, (Matriculation and Intermediate Arts), and is now reading for the third. With what sacrifice his parents brought him up and are now defraying his expenses for education! And here the good boy wants to become a holy man! He should be earning to feed them, but he has no such thought!' 'What can you understand?' interposed the Mother. 'They are not the crow's fledglings but the cuckoo's. As they grow, they recognize their true mother and fly away from the nursing mother to their true mother.'¹ Rammay became a monk subsequently under the name Swami Gaurishwarananda.

When the Mother was at Jayrambati for the last time, a young man named Manasa got the ochre robe from her; and much elated thereby, he sat in the drawing-room of uncle Kali to sing sweetly some songs on goddess Kali, songs which charmed Maku and Radhu who sat by him, as also the Holy Mother and some of the aunts who heard from a distance. One of the aunts remarked, 'Sister-in-law has turned that boy into a monk.' And Maku joined in saying, 'With what expectations the parents of this boy brought him up; and all these are now dashed to the ground! Marriage, too, is a virtuous act in this world. If aunt goes on making monks in this way, Mahamaya will become angry with her. If they want to take orders, let them do so by themselves; why should aunt be instrumental in this?' After she had finished, the Mother said, 'Maku, they are all divine children; they will live on this

1. Refers to the habit of cuckoos laying eggs in crows' nests. The crows hatch the eggs and feed the young cuckoos till they can fly.

earth as pure as flowers. What can be happier than that? Haven't you seen into the happiness of this world? I am getting my very bones scorched by the fiery ordeals of your family lives.'

Even though naturally inclined to a life of renunciation, the Mother was very careful about granting Sannyasa. Since Swami Keshavananda was the only son of his mother, she did not at first consent to his renouncing the world; but when she was assured that he had his mother's approval she gladly agreed. As the Swami suffered from asthma and was in bad health, his mother prayed to the Holy Mother before he embraced the monk's life that she might not have to see her son die before her. The Mother granted the boon, which was duly fulfilled.

In 1913, Brahmachari Devendra came to Jayrambati from Banaras and prayed for Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about the condition of his family and when she became satisfied that the family would not suffer by losing him, she permitted him to get the ochre robes from Koalpara and granted him Sannyasa on the next day.

Again, when during her last illness at the 'Udbodhan', she was informed of the death of the father of a young man living with her, she inquired of him about his family affairs and said subsequently, 'Can you understand why I asked you today so much about your family, and your mother? When I first got the news of your father's death from G. I asked him on whom else your mother could depend, whether she had sufficient provision for her maintenance, and whether she could do without you. Having been told that she can manage even if she loses you, I thought within myself, "Good! As the boy has a noble intention, there won't be any great hindrance to his continuing in the holy path."'

Once she had granted Sannyasa after thorough inquiry, she was not to be swerved from her decision by criticism, nay, not even by tears; for it was her conviction that one who renounced for God was really blessed. Soon after an

aspirant had left Jayrambati with ochre clothes granted by the Mother, his mother and wife came there weeping bitterly for securing a cancellation, and complaining that such indiscretion was going to ruin a family. But the Mother firmly told them, 'He has not done any wrong, he has chosen the right path; and I have been told that he has provided for your maintenance.' They were pacified by the Mother's affection and persuasion and left Jayrambati in a peaceful frame of mind.

Instances are not rare when she set her face against Sannyasa. Once a woman disciple of hers wrote that her husband had been repeatedly telling her, 'You go away with your children and live with your parents. I shall not live in the world any longer, but shall become a monk.' Every line of the woman's letter was full of piteous wail and helpless cry for succour. Hearing the letter read, the Mother said with some emotion, 'Just see the impropriety of the thing! He will be a monk, forsooth! Why did he marry? If you really want to give up, first make suitable arrangement for the subsistence of your dependents.'

Once there came two devout young men on the first day of the worship of Durga. They offered lotuses at the Mother's feet and prayed for Sannyasa. There was in their talks and demeanour an unnatural sentimentalism at which the Mother smiled; and when they showed their eagerness for Sannyasa she dissuaded them saying, 'That will come in due course, my boys.' They went away disappointed.

In her estimation, the ideal of Sannyasa was very high. About a monk she said one day, 'Why should he live with a householder just because he is ill? There are Maths and Ashramas. A monk is a model of renunciation. If a wooden female doll should lie upturned on the road, a monk shall not so much as turn it with his feet to have a look at it. And it's extremely wrong for a monk to possess money. There's nothing that the round discs can't do, even to the extent of jeopardizing life.' At times, she was strict with her own sons on these matters. Returning to

Calcutta from Rameswaram she made inquiries about a monk and was told that he had been pining to see her for the last three or four months. Instead of being flattered by this, she said with annoyance, 'How strange! A monk should go beyond attachment. Even a golden chain is no less a fetter. A monk shouldn't become a victim of attachment. What's this that they talk so often of motherly love, and complain, "I haven't been vouchsafed the Mother's love" ? What's all that? To have the men-folk always moving about me, well, I don't like all that. The frame at least is human. Consideration of Divinity comes only after that. I have to live with girls and women of respectable families. Ashu used to be always stirring about upstairs in connection with making sandal-paste and such odd jobs; I reprimanded him.'

A man renounces the world in order to be freed from its worries, so that he may more fully adhere to God. Meditation on God is his bounden duty. A monk who had gone to Rishikesh, a well-known place for practising austerity at the foot of the Himalayas, wrote, 'Mother, you said, "You will see the Master in time."' But I have not been granted this up till now.' On hearing the letter read, the Mother said with annoyance, 'Do write to him, "The Lord is not under any obligation to come forward to meet you just because you have gone to Rishikesh."' He has become a monk. What will he do now except to call on God? God will reveal Himself when it pleases Him.'

A monk has to be vigilant about his own dignity of demeanour. Brahmachari Girija went to Jayrambati, some time in 1906. He was not yet a monk in the real sense of the term. Uncle Prasanna was then about to start for his second wedding ceremony and invited him to join the nuptial party. But the Mother intervened and said, 'He is a monk; he need not go.' Next day, at meal-time at noon the Mother said to Girija, 'My boy, shall I serve you curd?' Girija, out of natural modesty, said, 'No, I don't need it.' And the Mother added approvingly, 'Better

not take this curd, since this is associated with the marriage.'

Once when there was a proposal for Swami Shantananda's going to Banaras with a noted devotee of the Master, the Mother said, 'You are a monk; the railway fare will be so difficult for you to get. They are householders, why should you go with them? You will be travelling in the same compartment; who knows, they may say to you, "Do this, do that." You are a monk, why should you be doing all that?' As the news of one of the disciples of the Mother having changed his ochre robe for the white dress of a householder reached the Mother, she said with disgust, 'An earthen vessel can't hold a lioness's milk. By continuously eating food at the houses of wordly men his mind has become polluted.'

By showing respect towards monks and monasticism, she made people respect them. Although she granted Sannyasa to almost all of the Koalpara Ashrama, she did not give the ochre robe to young Varada because he had to run errands for the Mother and Radhu. When asking him to do certain things, the Mother used to tell him now and then, 'If you wore the ochre garment, my son, could I order you to do these? I would feel hesitant even if you touched my feet with your hands.' As this meant delay in becoming a monk, the Mother consoled him saying, 'You need have no anxiety at all. Afterwards whenever you feel the hankering you have merely to approach Sarat (Saradananda), and he will arrange for it.' For the same reason the Mother did not give Sannyasa to her boy attendant Brahmachari Hari (Haripremananda).

The Mother was present at a birthday celebration of the Master at the Belur Math. After the midday meal Brahmachari Rashbihari poured water on her hands for cleaning them; and as it was her custom to wash the feet also on such occasions, the Brahmachari poured water on her feet and proceeded to clean them with his hands, when the Mother said, 'No, no, my son, not you! You are worthy

to be worshipped by gods.' And she wiped her feet with her own hands. Rashbihari was then only a novice.

On another occasion the Mother was at the 'Udbodhan' with Radhu. The latter had anklets that jingled as she walked fast. One day as she descended quickly from the second floor to the first, the Mother heard the sound of those anklets; and when Radhu came nearer she said, 'Radhi, are you devoid of shame? Down there live all my Sannyasi sons, and you run about making your anklets jingle aloud! What will they think? Do take off your anklets at once. These boys and girls that live here, have not gathered here for the mere fun of it; they have come for spiritual practices and discipline. What will be the result if their discipline is undermined?' Radhu took off her anklets and threw them away in a huff. Another day, after bath, Radhu was seen combing her hair and tastefully arranging the locks by pressing them with a towel. This, too, annoyed the Mother, and she said so. The fact was that though she was the absolute mistress of the house, she looked to the spiritual needs of the monks for whose good she maintained all round the strictest vigilance.

This reverence for monks and anxiety for discipline were evident elsewhere as well. When she was at Koalpara with Radhu, she was dictating a list for the market to Brahmachari Varada. A woman devotee happened to pass that way, and her cloth inadvertently brushed against the Brahmachari's back. The Brahmachari hardly noticed it; but the Mother did and reproved the woman saying, 'How is this, my dear? Why do you walk about so carelessly? They are Brahmacharis. They are to be honoured. Bow down before him.'

Though the householders were as dear to her as the monks, the monks were in some sense more closely related to her. She used to say, 'My boy, if the world-renouncing ones were not there, with whom could I live?' One day an elderly woman devotee had some altercation with some

monk at the 'Udbodhan', as a result of which she left the house saying, 'By no means shall I return so long as he is there.' She defied all persuasion to retrace her steps. When the Mother came to know of all this, she felt vexed and said, 'What is she? A lay woman! If she wants to leave this place, let her do so. The monks live here after renouncing all for me.' A monk asked the Mother, 'Mother, are not all equal who have taken refuge in the Master, irrespective of their being monks or householders, inasmuch as they will all be freed?' The Mother answered, 'Good gracious! Can the monk and the householder be equal? The householders are a prey of passions and desires, while the monks have come away leaving everything behind. Whom else have these besides the Lord? Can they be compared with monks?'

Though she revered the monks, she cautioned them against pride. When Arupananda said to her, 'Mother, Sannyasa brings with it a great conceit,' the Mother corroborated him with the remark, 'Yes, a great conceit—"I haven't been saluted, I am not honoured, I have not been treated with the respect due to me!" Compared with all that, I am much better as (pointing to her white cloth) I am (i.e., with internal renunciation).'

In fact, she valued inner detachment more than outer trappings. Brahmachari Sadhan took the ochre robe from her and then inquired about the formalities he would have to go through for becoming a monk. The Mother told him slowly and solemnly, 'Faith and firmness are the basic things; if faith and firmness are there, then you have it all.' But as the Brahmachari was not satisfied with the answer, he reverted again and again to the question of ceremonies till at last the Mother was constrained to say, 'Get those things done by my sons at the (Belur) Math.'

It strikes us as though the Mother drew a line between the wearing of the ochre cloth as a help to spiritual discipline and as a reminder of a new path voluntarily chosen, and the renunciation of everything after formally perform-

ing the *Viraja-homa*, the scriptural sacrifice preceeding life-long monasticism. A clerk in the Bihar Secretariat felt disgusted with the world and came to the Mother for the ochre robe. The Mother having granted his wish, he retired to the Himalayas for austerity. As the other monks there advised him to perform the *Viraja-homa*, he sought the opinion of the Mother, who wrote in reply, 'I did not permit you to perform the *Viraja-homa* as it is a difficult matter.' The Mother, perhaps saw the inmost heart of this devotee, for he returned home after a long time.

In some cases, again, she did not sanction Sannyasa, but sent the candidates to other Sannyasis. In 1911, Swami Ramakrishnananda brought a young man named Surendra Vijay to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan' and requested her, 'Mother, this boy is accompanying me to Madras. Will you kindly initiate him into Sannyasa?' The Mother answered, 'Let Sarat do it.' But Swami Saradananda replied, 'I can't know anybody's mind; and as for Sannyasa and such things, it is for Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) to grant it or not.' Then the Mother said, 'Then let him have it at Puri from Rakhal.' Perhaps, in this case also, the Mother knew the young man's mind; for he returned home soon after.

When Swami Jagadananda approached her for Sannyasa, she gave him the ochre cloth after touching with it the feet of the Master and her own head, and then said 'I am giving you the ochre cloth; but have the *Viraja-homa* done under Rakhal's guidance at the (Belur) Math and get the (Sannyasa) name from him.'

Her attitude to Brahmachaya (the vow of celibacy), was unique. She helped many in this path. There was nothing of formality here; there was only the compassionate approval of the guru, coupled with the resolution of the disciples born of their unswerving faith and irrepressible longing. They might not belong to the Order, though many of those initiated thus entered the Ramakrishna Order in due course. We give here a single illustration.

In 1911, Surendranath Gupta went to Jayarambati and then to Kamarpukur with Brahmachari Gopesh. In course of a talk Surendranath came to learn that Gopesh was initiated into Brahmacharya by the Mother. Surendranath was then in Government service; but he longed for Sannyasa. Naturally, therefore, he was attracted towards Brahmacharya, and purchasing a new piece of cloth at Kamarpukur he returned to the Mother to get initiation into Sannyasa. The Mother inquired about his dependants and then showed the new piece of cloth to the Master and handed it over to Brahmachari Jnan saying, 'You form it into the outer and inner garbs.' When Surendranath proposed to resign from his post, the Mother advised him to continue for some time more in service pointing out that it was good to help the Lord's devotees with a portion of one's income. He obeyed this direction for some time and then repeated this request; the Mother did not consent even then. At last after the Mother's passing away, he freed himself completely from his domestic obligations and embraced the monastic life under the name Swami Sasangananda.

As in the case of men, so also in the case of devout women seekers, the Mother was of opinion that if there were suitable arrangements for sustenance and protection, they too might lead a celibate life. When the daughter of Narayana Iyengar of Mysore wanted to take up the vow of celibacy, the Mother asked Swami Saradananda to write a letter to that effect to Sri Iyengar. On another occasion, when a girl refused to marry, her mother approached the Holy Mother to persuade the girl to obey her parents. But the Mother said, 'Is it a small misery to be a slave to another and to pander to his whims for a whole life?' And then she explained that though a celibate life had its own risks, it was improper to force any girl into wedlock against her will.

Having considered Sannyasa and Brahmacharya in passing, we return to our main topic, the Ramakrishna

Order. Though the Mother was not directly associated with its management, still she guided it from a distance through counsel and spiritual influence, and by strengthening the bonds of love. Her relationship with the different limbs of the Organisation under such circumstances is an interesting study. They were all junior to her, being disciples of the Master, of herself, or of the disciples of the Master. That relationship foreshadowed love on the one hand and obedience on the other. Still it is instructive for us to follow the extraordinary way in which she adapted herself to the needs of different types of men and women.

In 1889 Swami Brahmananda had a strong desire for undertaking austerity in some remote and lonely spot and sought the opinion of the Mother who was then at Jayram-bati. She wrote to Balaram Babu, 'I hear that Rakhal desires to go to the western parts. He suffered from cold at Puri last time. It will be better if he goes in February after winter. But if his desire is irresistible, then I have nothing to say.' That was enough for Swami Brahmananda who left in December.

Although Swami Vivekananda's mind was almost decided about going to the U.S.A. in 1893, he wanted to be absolutely free from doubt and so thought, 'Well, the Mother is none else than a part of the Master. Why should I not write a letter to her? I shall do as she asks me to.' With this idea he wrote to her asking for her blessing. The Mother was extremely happy to hear from her beloved son after such a long time. But this presented a problem also for her—should she endorse his plan? About Narendra's real stature she had indubitable proof from a vision she had at Kamarpukur after the Master's passing away. Still in the present context there was a conflict between affection and decision; though Narendra's future was undoubtedly bright, how could a mother permit her son to cross the ocean under the then existing uncertain conditions? When her mind oscillated thus between two alternatives, she saw one night in a dream, the Master walking

over the waves and beckoning Swami Vivekananda to follow him. This removed her misgivings, and she blessed the Swami's project whole-heartedly. The Swami, on his part, was elated on receipt of this letter and said, 'Hay-day, now is everything fixed up; the Mother, too, wished me to go.'

A few years after this, Swami Saradananda went to Jayarambati for seeking the Mother's benediction before starting for the U.S.A.' This time also there appeared before her the vision of the vast field of the Master's work: so she wiped her tears with one hand and with the other she blessed the Swami and said, 'The Master is protecting you for ever, my son; there's nothing to fear.'

When the Mother lived at the Bosepara Lane house in Calcutta, some time in 1898, Swami Brahmananda came there and in consultation with Swami Yogananda drafted a letter to be posted to Swami A. in America directing him in the Holy Mother's name on certain important personal matters of health and spirituality. Then it was sent to the Mother for her opinion. She heard it through and said, 'Tell Yogen (Yogananda) and Rakhal (Brahmananda) that the letter is well written and that my wishes have been correctly conveyed. It has my full approval.'

In May 1914, a devotee came to take Swami Premananda to Malda in connection with a celebration there. The Swami agreed subject to the Mother's consent. And so they both proceeded to the Mother at the 'Udbodhan'. The Mother disagreed, for the Swami was then in bad health and Malda was a far-off and out-of-the way place; besides, a festival was fraught with personal inconveniences. The Swami bowed down to her wishes, but the devotee was in a quandary. They had now to unsettle a settled fact which was by no means so easy. Hence he remonstrated with the Mother, who recalled the Swami and said, 'Well Baburam, they are so solicitous; should you then go?' The devout son replied, 'What do I know, Mother? It shall be as you order!'

1. The Swami left Calcutta in March 1896, and arrived in London on April 1.

At last she said, 'Go for a while; don't stay there for long.' The programme was fixed up accordingly.

Swami Shivananda was the manager of the Belur Math. Brahmachari Nagen (junior) did something awkward, because of which his friends warned him that he would be turned out of the Math by the Swami. Full of fear, the Brahmachari at once left for Jayrambati without any notice and without any change of clothes. When he reached the Mother's house with dirty clothes and haggard looks, none could imagine that he belonged to the Belur Math. After he had revealed his identity, the Mother gave him two pieces of cloth and a wrapper and had a letter written to Swami Shivananda to the effect: 'My dear son Tarak, the Junior Nagen has offended you in some way. Being afraid that you will turn him out of the Math, he has come to me covering the whole way on foot. As to that, my boy, can a mother mind her son's offence? Don't, my boy, take any action against him.' She kept Nagen with her till the reply came. By the return of post the reply came, 'We are freed from anxiety learning that younger Nagen is at your place. We had been searching for him. Kindly send him over here; there is a dearth of hands here for the worship. I shall not take any steps against him.' On receipt of the letter, Nagen went with the Mother's permission to Badanganj with Prabodh Babu who gave him a couple of shirts and railway fare up to Belur. When he arrived there, Swami Shivananda held him fast in an embrace and said, 'How now, my boy! You went to the High Court to complain against me?'

In 1912, when the Mother was in Banaras, there came a woman who related to her the poverty she was suffering from and then requested her to arrange for some monetary help from the local Ramakrishna Mission centre. The Mother answered, 'I may tell them and try. But, my daughter, all their collection is from begging. And there's no counting what a lot of people they are helping. They have to disburse what they have as they think best.'

On the one hand there was this freedom, and on the other there was a strict regulation of it. Once it was decided to dismiss the cook at the 'Unbodhan'; but the manger was shilly-shallying on the plea that this would inconvenience the Mother. Hearing of this the Mother said, 'You are monks whose one aim is renunciation; can't you get rid of a servant?' Again when the Mother came to know that a monk at the Belur Math had slapped a servant for disobedience, she commented, 'They are (homeless) monks who should live under trees. And to think that they have their Math, their house, their servant and the beating of that servant to boot!'

Though such rare occasions evoked a few caustic remarks from her, love for the monks was a dominant note of all her dealings with them. One of the Brahmacharis used to go from Belur to Calcutta in passing boats during ebb tide for marketing at Burrabazar and would return by boat; otherwise he went to the 'Udbodhan' for midday meal. Owing to difficulties of communication and uncertainties of tide, he could not intimate his movements and often appeared at meal-time without notice. This irritated Golap-Ma. And one noon as he put in an appearance, she began castigating him loudly for his indiscipline. The Mother heard of this and, coming out to the verandah from her room, said to Golap-Ma, 'Now the Master's family is daily on the increase; and one or two like these are to be expected as a matter of course. Can you help that?' Golap-Ma still argued, 'He comes just when he likes and without any notice whatever.' The Mother said, 'Howsoever that may be, you are now to serve him food without delay, it is already late; my son has come after much rummaging.' Golap-Ma twitted her by saying, 'Why so much sympathy for him? Is he your father-in-law?' Nothing abashed, the Mother asserted, 'Yes, so it is. They are my fathers-in-law, my all.'

About a fortnight before the worship of Durga in 1919, four Brahmacharis walked from Belur Math to Jay-

Jayrambati and bowed down before the Mother. She inquired about her sons at Belur and wanted to know if the Brahmacharis had come with the permission of Swami Saradananda. They replied, 'No, Mother. In the afternoon before yesterday, as we walked out of the Math precincts and came in sight of the Grand Trunk Road, one of us said, "One can reach Banaras if one walks along this road." No sooner did he say so than the determination came to us, "Well then, let us not return to the Math and right away proceed along this road to Banaras." And thus we didn't return to the Math, or send any intimation of our action but walked along for some distance, when it struck us that since we had been walking to Banaras, it would be in the fitness of things to come to Jayrambati to take the monastic vow from you and then undertake austerity at Banaras for sometime by living on alms. That's why we have come to you.' The narration over, the Mother looked pensive for a while and then said slowly, 'Listen, my boys, it's my wish that you now return to the Math. The Durga worship will come off a few days hence. They will be in great difficulty about the various works. It was not proper for you to have come without telling Tarak (Shivananda). And you have come in this season (of malaria) without so much as informing Sarat (Saradananda). Had you told Sarat, he would not have allowed you to come.' And she added, 'Is it any less austerity to live at the Math? You have joined the Math only recently; you should live with them for some time; then everything will come slowly in due course.' The Brahmacharis were not dissuaded, but they rather kept on supplicating her for Sannyasa. Moreover, their leader asserted that they would perform austerity for a long time at Banaras with the determination of a Buddha 'to achieve the end or end the body'. The Mother was embarrassed by their doggedness, but she could not be cruel. She granted the ochre cloth to only one of them. Brahmachari Bholanath, the youngest of the group, had been introduced by her to the Belur Math, and so she was